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Power

ELLEN
THORNEYCROFT
FOWLER



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BY THE SAME AUTHOR

A DOUBLE THREAD
THE FARRINGDONS
CONCERNING ISABEL CARNABY
FUEL OF FIRE
CUPID'S GARDEN
SIRENS, AND OTHER STORIES
VERSES GRAVE AND GAY
VERSES WISE AND OTHERWISE
LOVE'S ARGUMENT, AND OTHER POEMS

PLACE AND POWER


By ELLEN THORNEYCROFT FOWLER

(MRS. ALFRED LAURENCE FELKIN)

Author of "A Double Thread," "Concerning Isabel Carnaby,"

"The Farringdons," "Fuel of Fire," etc.



  LONDON
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DEDICATION

TO EVERY BRITON WORTHY OF THE NAME,
WHO FOLLOWS RIGHTEOUSNESS INSTEAD OF FAME,
WHO PRIZES HONOUR MORE THAN PLACE OR Pelf,
AND LOVES HIS COUNTRY AS HE LOVES HIMSELF.



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BOOK I

THE CHALLENGE



CHAPTER I

ENTER CONRAD

He proved that God is but a kind
Of fundamental Cause ;
Nor knew it takes a perfect Mind
To fashion perfect laws.

—*Love's Argument.*

"It is wonderful what a hold superstition has obtained over the minds of English people," exclaimed Mr. Clayton ; "upon my soul it is ! You'd have thought they'd have had enough of it by this time, and be waking up to the realities of life. But, bless me, not a bit of it ! They're as keen over their Christmases and Easters and the rest as they were in the dark ages ; and that's what fairly beats me."

"I wonder if they really do believe it all ?" said Mr. Clayton's son and heir, with a superior indifference indicative of the sunny side of thirty.

"Believe it all ? Of course they do—more fools they ! And it hampers them above a bit. By Jove, how it does hamper them ! And yet they cling to it like limpets to a rock."

"I suppose they think they'll get something out of it some time, or they'd hardly go on with it. People don't do anything for nothing."

This graceful concession came from the younger Clayton. But his father took no such lenient view.

"Not they ! They can't go on thinking there's money

in a thing which never has had money in it, and never will have, and never even pretended to have. It's just folly—folly and superstition; and that's the long and the short of it."

And then Mr. Clayton proceeded, to the best of his ability and to his own complete satisfaction, to demolish the Christian religion. The fact that Christianity had existed for something over eighteen hundred years, and himself for a little under sixty, had no manner of weight whatsoever with Mr. Clayton. He preached the gospel of wealth, and Christianity the gospel of poverty; and if anybody could not see how superior the former was to the latter, that person's opinion was not worth having in Mr. Clayton's estimation.

He was one of those men that feel themselves equal to demolish anything: the manufacture of hardware was his profession—his pastime the destruction of truth. That truth would have sufficient inherent vitality to continue to exist in defiance of his arguments, was an idea that had never occurred to Mr. Clayton. He regarded Churches as spiritual ninepins, set up for the sole purpose of being knocked down by him; and Creeds as illusive windbags, inflated for him to prick. His confidence in his own pricking and upsetting capacities fell little short of the sublime, and nothing short of the ridiculous; and he would have considered himself quite equal to the task, if only he could have had the chance, of wiping out the Ten Commandments like sums upon a slate, and jotting down in their place a few commercial maxims which he erroneously supposed to be original.

Such of the worthy man's adoration as was not expended upon his principal idol, Gold, was offered to an inferior though deserving power, which he called Common-sense; and these two deities formed the entire furniture of Mr. Clayton's Pantheon.

Of all loan-exhibitions which the world has ever seen

the most interesting, could it be arranged, would be an exhibition of private Pantheons. If people would lend their idols instead of their pictures to the Guildhall, how instructive as well as interesting it would be! For we all have them, those niched galleries where the gods whom we worship are ranged to receive our adoration. Some of us have many idols, and some but few; but even the most irreverent and prosaic of men now and then take the shoes from off their feet, feeling that the place where they are standing is holy ground.

And the nature of the idols which we worship decides the nature of the men and women that we are. Does Mammon fill the central niche of our Pantheon, then do we gradually vulgarize and coarsen, and become one with all those idolaters who from time immemorial have danced before the Golden Calf; is Faine the goddess whom we follow after, then do we fix hard and tearless eyes upon the far-off horizon-line, trampling under foot the flowers of beauty and of pathos that strew the way which we are bound to tread; and is our private Pantheon something different from these—in fact no Pantheon at all, but just a side-chapel in that great Temple which has no need of the sun or the moon to lighten it because the Lamb is the light thereof—then in His light do we see light, until the whole world is beautified and glorified by His Presence; and then do men take knowledge of us that we have been with Him.

It was on an Easter morning, somewhere about the middle of the nineteenth century, that Tertius Clayton thus attacked the great Festival which the Church was then celebrating; and it was on the high-road leading from the town of Silverhampton to the village of Crompton that the attack took place. In those days Silverhampton had not yet thoroughly awaked from sleep, nor stretched out her long arms in the direction of Tettleigh and Crompton and Fenn and Sedgehill, as she does at the

present time, until all these outlying districts have become almost a part of herself. Instead, a perfect wilderness of orchards made a complete hiatus between the town and the villages surrounding her—orchards which were alike a wonder of beauty, whether covered with snow-drifts of white blossoms, or crowned with golden coronets of ripened fruit. And every Sunday morning did Mr. Clayton walk out with his son at the hour appointed for public worship, to testify to all who passed by that he, Tertius Clayton, was in no way indebted to his Maker for his creation, preservation, or any other of the blessings of this life. The most devout Christian in Silverhampton did not worship his God more regularly and consistently than did Mr. Clayton defy Him; and there was a certain amount of humour in the pertinacity with which the man endeavoured to insult his Maker and shock his fellow townsmen at the same time. But humour, unfortunately, was not one of Mr. Clayton's strong points; otherwise he would have doubted less implicitly than he did.

For the rest, he was a self-made man; that is to say, he had made a large fortune, and consequently had found no time to develop himself at all. In his youth he had enjoyed no advantages of education; but of later years he had instructed himself according to his own lights and desires, the consequence being that the superstructure of knowledge which he had erected was built upon such an inadequate foundation that it was for ever toppling over and landing him in some absurdity.

When he had left off being young and had begun to be wealthy, he took to wife a Sedgehill girl of humble origin, whose prayer all her life had been to marry a rich man. Her heart's desire was granted to her; and, as is often the way when one's heart's desire is an unworthy one, the granting of it was her sole and sufficient punishment.

For such leanness was sent into her soul withal, that after ten years of Mr. Clayton's society she was so weary of him that she turned her face to the wall and died: even her only child had not the power to detain her, for was he not his father's son?

Perhaps of all the disappointed people in this world there are none so bitterly disappointed as those who have got what they wanted; because human nature is so sadly prone to want such things as are unworthy. There was much wisdom in the fairy-tale of the merchant's three daughters, one of whom asked for gold and jewels, another for gorgeous raiment, and a third for a rose out of the garden. The two elder ones were disappointed by the fulfilment of their wishes, as they were bound to be. But the youngest daughter, who asked only for the simple and healthful joys which belong by right to all the denizens of life's garden, was abundantly satisfied by receiving all that she asked for, and a fairy-prince into the bargain.

There is a great truth hidden in this story—a truth also set forth in a more wonderful book than any fairy-tale that ever was written—the truth that to those who seek first the highest thing, all other things are abundantly added. “Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness,” means something infinitely more than what is conventionally covered by the term Religion. It means the best and the highest in everything—in art and life and politics and nature and human love; it means the realization that all outward and visible joy and beauty is but a sign and a sacrament of an inward and spiritual grace—a demonstration of a Love Which passeth knowledge, and Which still strives, as is the way of all love, to express itself by tangible means. It is when we seek the ideal in everything and refuse to be satisfied with less, that we attain the best; and all other things are added unto us. It is when we love the creature

more than the Creator, and prize God's gifts for their own sake rather than for the sake of the Giver, that the very gifts themselves lose their value and their charm, until finally there is taken away from us even that which we have.

But although he failed to chain his mother to earth, Mrs. Clayton's child was a person of great importance in her husband's eyes, as being the sole descendant and representative of himself. It was not Mr. Clayton's way to see visions and to dream dreams on behalf of his child, as is the way of so many fathers; but he made up his mind what his child should do, and intended to see him do it. At present he had given the boy as good an education as he could; he had sent him to Northbridge School—a celebrated school in those days, which turned out many good and able men; and thence to Cambridge, from which home of learning Conrad had lately come for the Easter vacation. Nature had indeed been lavish with her gifts to this young man. In addition to decided mental power, he possessed undeniable physical beauty, both of which great blessings were crowned with the still greater one of unusual bodily health and strength. Even though his handsome face was somewhat marred by its coldness of expression, and his fine figure by its absence of well-bred grace, he was nevertheless what Shakespeare would have described as a proper man.

The great weakness in Conrad Clayton's character was want of heart; but he was strong enough to admit—even to himself—his own weaknesses. To assume a virtue if we have it not may be a very wise policy in our dealings with the world; but it is an extremely dangerous one in our dealings with our own souls. To be conscious of our limitations—that is knowledge; to realize that there are mountain-tops to which we can never climb, and where the air would be too rare for us if we could—that is

wisdom ; and in this respect, at least Conrad Clayton was wise. He knew that love would never satisfy him as it satisfied some men—that he would never extract the bliss from domestic happiness that some men extract—and he arranged the programme of his life accordingly.

Mr. Clayton's home, rejoicing in the singular name of "The House that Jack Built" (though why and wherefore nobody knew), was an old, white, substantial house at the beginning of the road which led from Silverhampton to Northbridge. Now the old house is in a street of buildings of later growth : but in those days it was considered quite a country residence ; and there was a toll-gate between it and Silverhampton, where the dusty wayfarer might slake his thirst in curds and whey.

After pulverizing Christianity as a whole, and especially that branch of it in these realms established, Mr. Clayton continued :

"Don't go bothering your head about religion and fal-lals of that kind, my boy ; you won't have time for them, if you do all that I mean you to do. Put your money on the horses that win—that's what I say ; and I never yet met the religion that was one of that sort."

Conrad smiled with the omniscience of the undergraduate.

"I'm not likely to do so, my dear father : I know better than that, I hope."

"Bless my soul, if you knew as I do how folks have sacrificed themselves for religion, you'd fairly laugh ! I've come across them myself—scores of them in my time—that were always worrying themselves whether things were right or wrong, till they didn't know whether they were on their heads or their heels."

"Their heads would have been hardly strong enough to support them, I should imagine."

Mr. Clayton chuckled.

"Right you are, my boy—right you are! Religious folks aren't particularly strong in the head, as you say; they all run to soul—and soul is a drug in the market nowadays. But just you study your bank-book, and let your Bible be: that's my advice to you, and I wasn't born yesterday nor the day before."

"No, you weren't; and you've made the best use of your time in the world."

"Remember, there's only one world, and that's this one; and it's good enough for me, I admit. I can't see why folks go snivelling for a better one." (A problem which is naturally more puzzling to the wealthy than to those less handsomely endowed with this world's goods.)

"Neither can I," agreed Mr. Clayton, junior, "except that it is in all probability sheer idleness on the part of the snivellers. It is easier to cry for the moon than to conquer the earth, and decidedly less dignified; nevertheless I mean to go in for the latter exercise."

"That's right, my boy, that's right," cried his father, slapping him on the back. "You'll be a great man yet."

"Such is my intention, and has been for some time."

"And you must bear this in mind, Conrad: when folks are running races they don't hamper themselves with unnecessary weights; they throw them all off; and that's what you must do in the race of life if you mean to win."

"I certainly mean to win."

"Well, two of the most troublesome weights that men hamper themselves with are religion and love," Mr. Clayton continued. "They say that love and religion are the chief furnishers of Bedlam, but they do a sight more harm than that. You mark my words, if a man wants to sail straight into port ahead of all the other ships, he'll have to throw

love and religion overboard. -If he don't, they'll swamp him."

"Neither of them has any attraction for me," Conrad said coldly.

"And I hope they never will; for if they have, to the wall you'll go."

"But they haven't."

"If there's one thing softer than the things men do for religion, it's the thing they do for love. I've no patience with them. What on earth's the use of setting one woman up above all the rest and making such a fuss about her, when they're all as like as two pins as soon as you get past the colour of their hair and the shape of their noses? And even those don't matter, when once you get used to them."

"I suppose they don't."

"Not they. Why, I always had a fancy for a bright colour in a woman myself—red cheeks, you know, and black hair to match, and a fine figure; and yet if ever there was a pasty-faced, peaky, washed-out maypole of a woman, it was your poor mother. But, bless me! she suited me in other ways, and I never gave a thought to the colour of her hair from the day I married her till the day I buried her—though, now I come to think of it, it was a poor, pale, mousy sort of a colour, I must confess."

"Yes, love and religion are both heavy handicaps," said Conrad.

"Now, look at me," his father went on; "I never bothered myself about either of them, not I, and I've got a hundred thousand pounds if I've got a penny. Show me a religion that'll bring in a hundred thousand pounds in thirty years, and I'll say my prayers with the best of them." And Mr. Clayton laughed aloud at the subtlety of his own satire.

"Yes, father, you are quite right—the man who succeeds is the man who sets one goal before him, and allows

nothing to turn him away from it either to the right hand or to the left. Any man can get what he wants if he will confine himself to wanting one thing, and continue to want it for a sufficient length of time. It is the fools who chop and change about, who constitute the failures of society."

"Right you are, my boy, right you are! If a man will only make up his mind to get what he wants, without worrying himself as to the right and the wrong of things, he'll climb to the top of the tree, never fear."

"Certainly he will. The man who is alike independent of God and woman is the man who will finally have the world at his feet; and I intend to be that man."

"By Jove! you're a son to be proud of—a regular chip of the old block, as you may say!"

"I don't say that I shall never marry," Conrad continued. "I probably shall; but my wife will always be a secondary consideration in my life."

"And so she ought to be—so she ought to be! Your poor mother was a nice enough woman in her way, though a bit weak in the chest; but I never made her a first consideration, bless you! not I; and I shouldn't die worth two hundred thousand pounds if I had, and that's what I mean to do. And, besides, she never expected it; she knew her place and she kept to it, did your mother!"

Mr. Clayton did not think it necessary to add that she had also gone to her long home because she could not put up with him any longer. Probably he did not know it, and would not have minded if he had: a woman's likes and dislikes were matters that never entered into Tertius Clayton's philosophy.

"Some day I shall marry a good-looking, amiable woman who won't be troublesome or exacting; and she mustn't be too clever—I don't like clever women. I know a man who says he wants a wife who is clever enough to

be a credit to him in society, and not clever enough to see through him at home ; and it is so difficult to hit the happy mean. But I intend to hit it myself, when the right time comes."

"Yes," said Mr. Clayton, "clever women are a confounded nuisance as wives ; they're enough to drive a man mad with their overbearing, managing ways. And the fun of it is they think he don't see it !"

"He doesn't always."

"Doesn't he? That's all you know, my boy. He sometimes pretends he doesn't, for the sake of peace."

"Yet the clever women imagine that they can lead a man with an invisible string."

Mr. Clayton scoffed openly.

"Then let them imagine it if they want to ! But the man won't, poor fool ! It stikes me that a woman with an invisible string is like the king in the fairy-tale with invisible clothes : when the string is invisible it isn't there at all. What's the good of clothes that nobody can see? And what's the good of a string that other women can't see her pulling at, and envy her accordingly ?"

"Well, father, I think I can promise not to marry a clever woman ; but I should like her to be handsome, I must admit."

"And see that she's got something of her own into the bargain, my boy ; women that have got a little money of their own know how to take care of their husband's money—but those that bring nothing save nothing. That's my experience."

Conrad looked thoughtful.

"Yes, she shall have something of her own ; but I am not sure that it will be money. I shall have money myself, and mean to make more. Probably it would be more to my advantage to marry a woman of good birth or high rank."

"And have her giving herself airs, and looking down on you for the rest of your days, eh ?"

"No, she mustn't do that; no woman will ever look down upon me. But a woman never rises in the social scale, though a man may; therefore, if one is socially ambitious, it is well to secure a wife who will help one to rise, and not drag one back."

"Why don't women rise as fast as men?"

"I can't tell why, father; I only know that they don't. The woman who has been transplanted from an inferior sub-soil, always either brags or apologizes—both most atrocious habits, and equally damning evidence of her origin. But the really fine lady never seems to think about herself at all. She takes herself and her surroundings as a matter of course, which conduces both to her own ease and to the ease of all with whom she has to deal."

"Then don't the ill-bred men brag or apologize, eh?"

Conrad thought for a moment.

"No, I don't believe that they do," he answered slowly. "Men as a rule are less self-conscious, less subjective, than women, and therefore by nature better mannered. The gulf between a gentleman and a man of the lower orders is not half so wide as the gulf between a lady and a woman of an inferior class. And I should like my wife to be the kind that has neither to brag nor to apologize in order to assure the world that she both knows the correct thing and does it."

Mr. Clayton shook his head.

"Well, young folks think they know best, but they don't. Rank and birth are flimsy things that you can't rightly get hold of; but money is there for all the world to see and touch and handle. After all, there's nothing equal to money for giving a man solid peace and comfort."

"Money is very good in its way; but there is one thing better."

"And what may that be, for I've never come across it?"

"Power," replied Conrad: "power is the thing most

worth having in the whole world ; it is the thing to which all other things tend—the goal to which all roads lead. Money is only good in that it confers power ; and genius and rank and noble birth are only valuable for the same reason.”

Mr. Clayton looked at his son with a feeling as near akin to admiration as he had ever experienced for any being except himself.

“ Well, power’s a fine thing, I own—a very fine thing. And you mean to get it, do you, my boy ? ”

“ I do, and in the highest degree, too. I mean to be Prime Minister before I’ve done, and to govern England. And I defy any influence, either spiritual or sentimental, to stand in my way when once I have set my mind upon a thing.”

“ Then don’t go listening to parsons’ twaddle about praying for things and waiting till you get them. Make up your mind what you want, and then go for it, without being beholden to anybody whatsoever. Men with heads on their shoulders don’t want a God to be always looking after them and pampering them ; they can manage all right by themselves—thank you ! ”

“ As I mean to do ; and I should like to see the God Who could come between me and my heart’s desire when once I have put my shoulder to the wheel ! ”

As Conrad Clayton made this statement of his life’s aim and object, he and his father had just reached the top of Crompton Holloway ; and they stood still for a moment and looked back at the way that they had come, and at the waves and billows of blossoms which filled the valley between them and the town. On the summit of the opposing ridge the towers of the two old churches of Sedgemoor and Silverhampton raised their hoary heads to heaven, in silent protest against the philosophy of life thus enunciated by the younger man, and as witnesses to those eternal truths which he and his father had set

themselves to refute ; and as Conrad hurled his defiance at any Power Which should dare to stand between him and the fulfilment of his ambition, an answer came to his challenge in the clashing of the Easter bells, which was borne across the flower-filled valley on the wings of the strong east wind—an answer which told him, if he had but listened to it, of that great Might, set high above all principality and power, Which on this very morning, more than eighteen centuries ago, had fought with and conquered even death itself, and thereby brought life and immortality to light.

CHAPTER II

THE GAUKRODGERS

To render straiter still the narrow lane
The righteous trod,
He conjured up an image in his brain,
And called it God.

—*Love's Argument.*

“FATHER, will you ask a blessing?” said Mrs. Gaukrodger.

Mr. Gaukrodger explained to Providence as briefly as he could the effect which it was desirable that the viands of which they were about to partake should have both physically and spiritually upon his assembled family; and the party sat down to dinner.

It was on the same Sunday that Conrad Clayton had challenged heaven to withhold from him his heart's desire; but the Gaukrodgers were spending it in a very different fashion. True, they ignored the fact that it was Easter Day as completely as did Mr. Clayton himself; but that was only because they considered that a reverence for the great festivals of the Christian Church was a habit of mind which savoured of Popery, and was to be avoided accordingly.

“When we have concluded our midday meal,” said Mr. Gaukrodger to his assembled family, “you, Samuel and Peter, will repeat to me the heads of this morning's sermon; and you, Griselda, will give the application. You will therefore do well to go over it in your own minds meantime, so as to be able to render to me a satisfactory account of the

new light upon the Word which has been let into your hearts to-day," he added, thereby endangering the youthful digestions of the two sons and sole daughter of his house and heart.

"What did you think of Mr. Ockenden this morning, father?" asked Mrs. Gaukrodger. "To my mind it was not one of his happiest efforts."

Like all good wives, she knew what her husband expected her to say and think, and she spoke and thought accordingly.

"No, Hephzibah, it was not; there was a want of spirituality in his treatment of his text which somewhat shocked me."

"There was, Josiah; I quite agree with you."

"To my mind want of spirituality is a most serious fault in a preacher; it cuts at the very root of the matter, and saps his influence for good from the foundations."

"It does, father. You never spoke a truer word," assented Mrs. Gaukrodger.

"I am afraid Mr. Ockenden is becoming carnally minded and addicted to fleshly pleasures: I noticed that he partook freely—too freely for a minister of religion—of that plum-pudding you had upon the table when he dined with us last Lord's Day," remarked Mr. Gaukrodger, carving for himself another slice of roast veal.

His wife feebly expostulated.

"But I fear, father, that Mr. Ockenden is so poor that he rarely has enough to eat in his own house. You see his stipend is but small, and out of that he has to support an aged mother and an afflicted sister."

"In that case, my dear, send to his lodgings a leg of mutton and two plum-puddings," said Mr. Gaukrodger, who was of a far paler shade of black than he elected to paint himself: "but, all the same, carnal pleasures—notably the pleasures of the table—are a great temptation to a young man."

"That is quite true, Josiah,—quite true."

"I did not hold with his confusion of the snares of the world with the snares of false doctrine," continued Mr. Gaukrodger, warming to his work; "surely it is better to be without God in the world altogether than to worship Him with the superstitious idolatries of Papists, Puseyites, and the like!"

"Of course—of course, Josiah," agreed his wife.

It never occurred to her that there could be two opinions on *that* subject.

"I fear Mr. Ockenden is growing broad, Hephzibah, far too broad. I heard only yesterday that he had been seen walking along the open street in company and conversation with the Roman Catholic priest, and I said to myself, 'Ockenden is meddling with the accursed thing.' Those who touch pitch cannot fail to be defiled; and I fear I noticed something of the taint of Puseyism in this morning's discourse. Or perhaps I should hardly say Puseyism, but rather a toleration of Puseyism—an idea that there might be some grain of truth latent in opposing and diverse forms of worship, which of all errors is the most deadly. Sin is sin, and acknowledges itself to be sin; but false doctrine puts on the semblance of truth, and so leads men's souls astray. Of a truth the devil is never so dangerous as when he assumes the appearance of an angel of light."

Mr. Gaukrodger always addressed his own household as if he were addressing a public meeting. It was his way of enjoying himself, for dearly he loved the sound of his own voice. And nobody interrupted him. His wife had no wish to do so; and for children to be allowed to speak at meals, was a license undreamed of in the middle of the last century.

"I also could not countenance Mr. Ockenden's exposition of the doctrine of election," continued Mr. Gaukrodger; "it showed forth a sad and lamentable ignorance, on his part, of the things which belong unto his peace."

It never occurred to Mr. Gaukrodger that a sermon was

an opportunity of enlightening the ignorance of the hearers ; he rather regarded it as an occasion for exposing that of the preacher—an idea which obtains in certain circles unto this day.

When the midday meal was concluded, and the children had repeated to their father that residuum of the morning's discourse which lay congealed at the bottom of their youthful minds, the long Sunday afternoon began—a wearisome season, when all the family assembled in the parlour, and Mr. Gaukrodger dealt out to them such spiritual nourishment as he deemed suitable to their several conditions. Griselda dutifully read, or tried to read, whatever book her father thought meet to dole out to her ; but the boys read theirs upside down, and behind before, and saw how many small words they could make out of one long one, and carried on silent and exciting competitions as to who could find the most letter f's in one page ; and, in short, generally relieved the tedium by such ingenious and strange devices that the duty became almost a delight. But this only lasted until the soft dews of kindly sleep produced their wonted effect upon the wearied eyelids of Mr. Gaukrodger. Then the turning over of leaves (without which all literary pursuits are of necessity somewhat slow) ceased, and the little Gaukrodgers became as marble statues until such good time as their father woke up again.

They were never allowed to go out of doors on a Sunday, except to and from public worship : fresh air was considered a carnal indulgence : and those Sunday afternoons were as weekly inquisitions to them. It would be difficult to describe in words the hatred cherished in the breasts of the little Gaukrodgers with regard to the keeping of what their father termed “the Seventh Day”—by which he meant the First. Friday afternoon and the whole of Saturday were darkened by the long shadow cast before by the approaching Sunday ; and Monday morning's awakening was instinct with the bliss of relief after suffering and of peace

after strife. Yet their father spoke of it frequently as "the Lord's Day"; and would have averred, had he been catechized upon the subject, that the God Whom he worshipped was a God of love! Such was the stern Calvinism of the earlier part of the last century.

Nevertheless Josiah was a good man according to his lights, in spite of the harshness, not to say cruelty, of his creed; for the excellent reason that, struggle against it as men may, the Potter always is, and always will be, greater than the clay which tries so hard to fashion itself. Mr. Gaukrodger was an exemplary citizen, an honourable man of business, and an excellent husband and father; but his eyes were holden that he could not see. With his children he was unbendingly strict; anything in the form of an indulgence he would have regarded as a sin on his part and a snare on theirs. He endeavoured to behave towards them as he believed his Heavenly Father behaved towards him. That his conception was a wrong one was not perhaps altogether Mr. Gaukrodger's fault, but rather the fault of the age in which he lived—an age which regarded beauty as the one unpardonable sin in art, life, or religion. If his family showed any signs of finding happiness in any particular thing, he straightway removed that thing far from them, lest it should ensnare their souls; and he fully expected his Heavenly Father to do the same by him, should he ever be discovered in enjoying anything—but he took care that he never was.

Yet he loved his children—loved them with his whole heart—loved them, in fact, so much that he was afraid God would find out how much he loved them, and would punish them and him accordingly. So he endeavoured to throw dust in the Eyes of his Creator by treating his offspring with unnecessary severity, and by pretending that the Divine instinct of fatherhood, implanted in his heart by that same Creator, had never, as far as he was concerned, existed. But the God Whom he maligned, yet worshipped,

knew whereof he was made, and remembered that he was but dust. The glorious fact remains that the many inventions wherewith men obscure the truth do not alter the truth itself: they shall perish, but it shall endure. And although every passing age invents new ideas and accepts fresh traditions, there is One Who is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever; and His Word is truth.

A fisherman once went out fishing on a hill-encircled loch in the far north of Scotland, and as he fished he talked with his boatman. After they had run up the gamut of conversation, from fishing to theology, the traveller asked:

"Weel, Sandy, and is there any particular psalm now that ye lean upon?"

"Yes, sir, there be, just."

"And what may it be now, Sandy?"

"Weel, sir, it's just a paraphrase."

"And what paraphrase may it be, Sandy?"

"Weel, sir, it's just a paraphrase that has brought comfort to my soul many and many a time; and it's the paraphrase that begins—

Few are thy days and full of woe,
O man of woman born!"

Mr. Gaukrodger's theology was on very much the same lines as that of the Scotch boatman; that same paraphrase would have been equally comforting to him. But in spite of the superstructure of error which he had builded thereon, Josiah had got fast hold of a fundamental article of belief which has removed mountains and subdued kingdoms in the histories of men—which wrought deliverance for Joshua at the siege of Jericho, and for Joan of Arc at the siege of Orleans, and which alike supported S. Stephen before the Sanhedrin, and John Bunyan in Bedford gaol: namely, the belief in a living and personal God, Who takes a living and personal interest in everything which concerns His children.

It is doubtless bad for a man to worship a God Whom he has made in his own image, as men have been prone to do ever since the world began, be they Jews or Greeks or Christians ; but it is better to do this than to worship no God at all. And in these misty modern days, when people are so afraid of condemning as false what is true, that they accept wholesale as true what is false—when they refuse to tie themselves down by creed or dogma, but profess to be guided by vague imaginations and inherited tendencies—when they decline to identify themselves with any Church, but instead raise altars to an unknown God of blurred outlines and shadowy negations—one rebels against the uncertainty and elusiveness of it all, and becomes homesick for the God of battles of the Hebraic dispensation, or for the stern Deity of Puritan England, or even for the idealized types of physical perfection whom the Greeks adored upon Olympus.

We are growing too subjective in this twentieth century of ours, where the air is all used up, and where we are so blinded by our own smoke that we cease to believe in fire from heaven. But the fire from heaven exists all the same, whether we recognize it or whether we do not—which fact also is most difficult for us to accept, with our modern notions that sin and disease are nothing but vain imaginations of our own brains, or inherited tendencies pass some dead and gone ancestor. Nevertheless, they have to be reckoned with sooner or later, in their actual and objective entity ; but the Ego which is in each one of us shall indeed prove stronger than them all, and shall conquer in the end. And even that final conquest by ourselves is not of ourselves ; it is the gift of God.

Upon the youthful Samuel and Peter Gaukrodger the severity of their father's creed had no evil effects whatever. They were healthy young animals who regarded religion very much as they regarded playthings : the one was the

resource of the very old, the other of the very young ; and they themselves were alike too young for the one and too old for the other. If it interested their parents to think and talk of hell, judgment, and the like, by all means let them do it, thought Samuel and Peter—though wherein the fascination of such subjects lay, the two boys failed to conceive.

But it was very different with Griselda, the eldest of the three, so called after a great-aunt from whom Mrs. Gaukrodger had expectations—and never anything else. She was a sensitive, highly-strung creature, with an enormous fund of unclaimed affection stored up in her tender heart ; and the iron of her parents' doctrine entered her very soul. She believed implicitly all that they taught her, and the belief well-nigh frightened her to death. She used often to lie awake the whole night long in sheer terror of that awful Day of Judgment which she believed might overtake her at any moment, and for which, poor child ! she felt herself so insufficiently prepared ; and great was her relief when day followed night in the ordinary succession wherein they had followed each other since the foundation of the world.

And she was as much terrified of the Powers of Darkness as she was of the Powers of Light. There was nothing hazy in the little Gaukrodgers' conception of the personality of the devil ; they knew exactly what he was like, down to the minutest detail of his personal appearance, for did they not gloat weekly over his portrait as set forth in the illustrated edition of *Pilgrim's Progress* ? They were familiar with the very twist of his tail and the shadow of his bat-like wings ; and it was by no means a pleasing or reassuring picture—in fact, it was so much the reverse that the boys put it from them save in the hours of broad daylight ; but poor Griselda was made of slighter elements, and the Horror haunted her whether or no.

The girl's spiritual terrors went near to undermining her health; and although Mrs. Gaukrodger regarded any exhibition of maternal love as a carnal inclination, she could not altogether stifle her natural anxiety as Griselda's always delicate complexion grew still paler, and her lovely profile even sharper in its classical outline.

There was no doubt that Griselda Gaukrodger was a beautiful girl; her hair was golden, her complexion pink and white, and her features almost perfect in their regularity. Her parents had rigorously striven to keep from her the fact that she possessed a gift so fatal in its consequences as that of beauty; but, unconsciously to themselves, they had not succeeded. It was an article of the Gaukrodgers' faith that no parents should ever allow their children to suspect that these latter aroused any feeling akin to joy or pride in the parental bosoms; and that therefore it was the duty of fathers and mothers to be as reticent regarding the virtues of their offspring as they were voluble with respect to the faults. The advantages of this course were twofold: in the first place it kept the children from becoming puffed-up and vain-glorious, or even in many cases from attaining to a sufficient amount of self-respect to help them along on their way through the world; and in the second, it prevented that stern Deity, Whom the Gaukrodgers so ignorantly worshipped, from discovering that His children found pleasure in His good and perfect gifts, and consequently from removing the desire of their eyes at a stroke.

But it takes many cunningly devised fables altogether to eradicate human nature from the sons and daughters—and especially the mothers—of men; so it happened that Mrs. Gaukrodger finally confided her fears about Griselda's health to her husband's ear, coupled with a suggestion that it might do the child good to pay a visit to

Mr. Gaukrodger's three maiden sisters, who dwelt within two miles of Silverhampton town.

Josiah had been born at Silverhampton, but had migrated early in his career to Merchester, a large manufacturing town about twelve miles distant, and there had married the daughter of a leading tradesman of the place. His three sisters, however, Jemima, Kezia, and Keren-happuch, stayed on in their father's home—a square white house standing some little way off the high-road which leads from Silverhampton to Northbridge.

Although it was situated barely two miles from the market-place, Oxhills, as the house was called, was in the depth of the country. Between it and the town stretched that wonderful wilderness of orchards; and on the other side the lonely road dipped down between natural walls of red sandstone, until it crossed the canal at the foot of the hill, and ascended the steep Holloway beyond.

The three Misses Gaukrodger were delightful old ladies—at least, they were considered old then, though nowadays women of their years would count as being barely middle-aged; but women grew old quickly in those bygone times—partly, doubtless, owing to those inartistic ways of dressing themselves which disfigured our grandmothers. The sisters were distinguished by that extreme pleasantness which is apparently the prerogative of the single and unattached. It is remarkable how much more trouble, as a rule, unmarried women take to make themselves agreeable than do married ones—probably because they are still on their promotion, while the married woman's fate is fixed, and the third volume of her story already written: nothing that she can do or leave undone can make much difference. It is the single woman who listens attentively to the more than twice-told tales of the elderly men; who are astonished

when they ought to be astonished, and amused when they ought to be amused; who punctuate the familiar anecdotes with the correct and called-for giggles and exclamations. The married woman, if she is a good wife, listens to her own husband's favourite stories, and then feels that she has done her duty by her sex and towards his. But not so her single sisters. She, so to speak, is a specialist, while they are general practitioners; and it is the general practitioners which deal the most successfully with the trivial cases, as all the world knows. And of these were the three Misses Gaukrodger.

It was noteworthy that while Jemima was the eldest, and Keren-happuch the most intellectual, of the trio, Kezia invariably took precedence of her sisters and entered a room first. This unaccountable custom so puzzled the good ladies of Silverhampton that one at last ventured to ask Miss Jemima the meaning of it.

"Do you not know?" replied Miss Gaukrodger, stiffening with vicarious pride—"Sister Kezia once had an offer."

But this proof of feminine superiority had by no means turned Miss Kezia's head. True, she curtseyed and bridled and tossed her ringlets with an assurance which a woman less sought-after would neither have assumed nor have been justified in assuming; but all the same she was a gentle soul, who enjoyed her past triumph with no desire for fresh worlds to conquer, and no envy of those who were still conquering them. She had justified her existence as a woman—she had won a man's love. Henceforward there was nothing left for her but to walk worthy of the honour she had once received. She had not accepted the offer; in fact it had never occurred to her to do so, marriage being such an upset in a well-ordered young woman's career. But her womanhood had been stamped with the one

acknowledged hall-mark of womanhood, and she was therefore content.

But although Miss Kezia was innocent of any jealousy with regard to more puissant queens, there was one field in which she could not brook a rival ; and that was the field of ill-health. She could smile in all charity upon women more gifted and more admired than herself ; but towards anyone who pretended to be unable to digest what she herself had digested, Kezia Gaukrodger was as adamant. She belonged, so to speak, to the *haute-noblesse* of indigestion, and in that realm she was an aristocrat of the most exclusive type.

There is no doubt that the aristocracy to which Miss Kezia belonged is of no mean order with regard to numbers. Many like to talk about their ailments, but few care to be excelled therein ; and strong indeed is the freemasonry between those who have similarly suffered in the flesh, and whose respective bodily infirmities have proved identical. If a man wishes to be popular (as what man does not?), let him have experienced the same ailments as have those persons whom he desires to please ; but let him beware lest his symptoms are in excess of theirs, or else he will make enemies instead of friends. The most popular people during the last decade of the nineteenth century were the people who had had influenza, and so could discuss it in all its various stages ; but whose recorded temperature had always kept one degree lower than the temperature of those with whom they conversed. There is a subtle flattery in a slight inferiority of temperature which even sanctified human nature cannot resist.

Jemima Gaukrodger—always called Sister by the other two, and never addressed by the familiarity of her Christian name—was a kindly old soul, in whose spirit the stern creed of her fathers was an exotic, and not, as in the case of her brother and his wife, an indigenous

growth ; and the leaning towards indulgence of her natural woman was for ever at war with the enforced strictness of her spiritual one.

Keren-happuch, the youngest of the three, was an extremely intellectual person, who prided herself upon knowing more instructive games than any other woman in Mershire. A tea-party at Oxhills, with Miss Keren-happuch at the helm, was a liberal education to the rising generation of Silverhampton. She could guess the most far-fetched incident in history after asking only twenty exhaustive questions ; she could write a page of an imaginary novel in the style of any writer alive or dead ; she could compose a perfectly sensible and almost beautiful poem out of the most incongruous and impossible *bouts-rimés* ; in short, there was no branch of intellectual parlour sport wherein Miss Keren-happuch was not a past mistress.

Griselda loved her three indulgent aunts better than she loved anyone else in the world, their only rival in her childish affections being a sailor brother of her mother, who used to bring her strange gifts from outlandish parts and call her " Little missy." When she was a small child she invented, after the manner of small children, a country of her own imagination. It was a wonderful country. The grass was of emerald, each blade being a separate jewel ; and it was studded all over with diamond daisies and sapphire violets. The paths were gravelled with coral beads ; and all the trees were Christmas-trees, bowed down under their fruit of presents. The birds had musical-boxes inside them, which played all manner of well-known tunes ; and right down the middle of the country ran a glorious river of delicious raspberry-vinegar. But the most delightful thing in this delightful region was the inhabitants thereof. It was not peopled with angels—Griselda knew too much about angels ; they were dangerous beings, sadly prone to unsheathe their flaming swords on the slightest

provocation. It was not peopled with fairies—Griselda knew nothing at all about fairies, fairy-tales having been strictly forbidden as vanity and lies. It was not even peopled with children—Griselda did not care for other children, being shy of the little girls and frightened of the little boys. No ; the population of Griselda's own country was after Griselda's own heart, and was composed of the nicest creatures she had ever seen or imagined : it was peopled entirely with uncles and aunts.

CHAPTER III

LOIS

Then One I took to be the gardener came ;
To Whom I cried, " Sir, is it nought to Thee
That sin and sorrow spoil Thy flowerets sweet ?"
For answer He but called me by my name,
And—as I doubted—turned and looked on me,
Who said, " Rabboni," falling at His Feet.

—*Verses Grave and Gay.*

GREAT was Griselda's joy when the following week she was sent off to pay a visit to her beloved Oxhills.

" Aunt Kezia, have you got a new heart ?" she asked her favourite aunt the day after her arrival.

Miss Kezia looked as much shocked as if Griselda had inquired of her if she ever washed.

" Of course, my love, of course ; the Lord saw fit, in His great mercy, to give me one when I was a child of fourteen."

" Well, He hasn't given me one yet, and I'm sixteen turned," groaned Griselda, in deep depression.

Miss Kezia sighed. In those days young people were expected to have run up and down the whole gamut of spiritual experience by the time that they were fifteen or thereabouts ; just as nowadays they are expected to have fathomed the depths of human passion by the time that they are twenty-one. The literature of the day in both cases may be held responsible for the theory of the respective phases, and for much of the practice also. The

morbid young person in the middle of last century read unhealthy books and thought unhealthy thoughts about the relations between herself and God; the morbid young person of to-day reads unhealthy books and thinks unhealthy thoughts about the relations between herself and man. There is a fashion in the thing—a ridiculous, morbid, unhealthy fashion. Then, as now, nine times out of ten the attitude was purely artificial and abnormal, being but the result of the special affectation of the age; and if then, as now, the young person had thought less about herself and more about other people—if, in short, she had been more objective and less subjective—neither of the evils would have arisen.

“Have you prayed about it, my dear child?” Miss Kezia asked.

“Oh, yes, aunt, over and over again! Many and many a night I’ve told God that I wouldn’t go to sleep till He’d given me a new heart, for fear the Day of Judgment should come in the night and I should go straight to hell; but He did not take any notice.”

“Hush, my love, you must never say that God does not take any notice. Sometimes it pleases Him that the heavens should be as brass above us, and He as One That heareth not; and to whatsoever pleases Him we must submit.”

“I expect I don’t ask in a proper spirit,” suggested Griselda. “I don’t care about being religious for its own sake—only because it would save me from going to hell. I wish I could want to be good in the proper way, but I can’t.”

“Sometimes it pleases the Lord to harden our hearts, as He hardened the heart of Pharaoh.”

“Then it is cruel of Him to punish us for doing what He has made us do, Aunt Kezia!”

“Hush, hush, my love! You must never call what God ordains cruel.”

"But it is cruel to punish people for what they can't help. You'd never think of punishing the kitten for what you'd made it do; and why should God be less kind to us than we are to the kitten?"

There is a story told of a Scotch minister who was preaching a sermon on the judgment of God, and he concluded his discourse thus:

"My friends, ye may think that what I have been saying to ye is a hard saying; but ye must just bear in mind that the Almighty is obleeged to do many things in His offeecial capacity that He wad scorn to do as a preevate individual."

Miss Kezia found a similar place of refuge in the present difficulty.

"Well, my dear child, it is not for sinful worms like ourselves to set bounds and limits to the Divine Justice. Do not for worlds let your papa hear what I am now going to say; but I sometimes venture to hope that perhaps, after all, God is kinder and more merciful to us than He appears to be." ("Than men say that He is," would have been more correct; but Miss Kezia found it difficult, as we all do, to differentiate between the truth and what we have been taught as the truth.)

That afternoon Griselda was playing in the fields with her special friend, Lois Ireby; and she put to Lois the question which was occupying her thoughts so fully just then.

"Lois, have you got a new heart?"

"I don't think so, but I don't know what a new heart feels like."

"It means feeling how awfully wicked you are, and how terribly angry God is with you; and being somehow on His side, and not on your own."

"But God is always on our side, isn't He?"

"Of course not, Lois; He is always against us. But don't you ever feel how dreadfully wicked you are?"

"No, never. I never think about it. I think about how good God is, but not about how wicked I am."

Griselda looked grieved.

"Then you won't be saved. You can't be good if you don't think you are wicked ; and the better you are, the wickeder you'll feel."

"I don't believe that," said Lois firmly ; "at least, I never heard father say anything about it."

"Oh ! Lois, don't you hate religion ?" asked Griselda after a pause.

The other girl stared at her in amazement.

"Griselda, what a thing to say ! Hate religion ? Why, how could I hate the thing which makes us happier than anything else in the world ?"

"It doesn't make me happy," replied Griselda sadly ; "it almost frightens me to death."

"But how can it frighten you, when it's the one thing that keeps us from being frightened ? When I remember that God is above everything, and that He is always taking care of me, I feel that nothing will ever make me afraid again."

"Aren't you afraid of the end of the world coming any day or any night ?" asked Griselda in a gloomy whisper.

"Oh, no !"

"It may, you know."

"But that only means that Christ will come again, as He came long ago ; and I do so want that to happen. Think how beautiful it would be to see His Face, and to feel His Touch, and to hear Him tell you how much He loves you !"

Doubt was written large all over Griselda's countenance.

"Do you think it would really be like that ?"

"Of course I do. And then I think He'd take me in His Arms, and put everything straight that had ever vexed me, just as mother used to do before she died."

"Oh ! I don't believe He'd be a bit like that. I think He'd be more like father."

"I expect He'd be like father, too," asserted Lois, to

whom the word "father" had a totally different meaning from Griselda's interpretation thereof; "and think how lovely that would be! You see, fathers are so brave and big and strong, they can always make everything right quite easily. Mothers *want* to, but fathers *can*. I couldn't be afraid of a God Who was anything like my father."

"But I could of One Who was anything like mine," groaned Griselda.

It must be admitted that the idea of a Mr. Gaukrodger, endowed with omniscient foresight in detecting sin and infinite power in punishing it, was not a reassuring one.

And then the first butterfly of the year flew across the Oxhills meadow, and the children were so busy chasing it that they forgot all about dogma for a time, and lost themselves in that other branch of revelation which men call nature.

Lois was the only child of Stephen Ireby, the leading bookseller in Silverhampton. For four generations the Irebys had kept the old bookshop in King's Square, until they had grown as proud of it as men grow of a landed estate. For four generations they had proved themselves gentlemen in the true sense of the word, doing justly and loving mercy and walking humbly with their God; and they had, moreover, read and re-read the books by which they were surrounded, until they had become one of the most cultured families in Mershire.

Stephen no longer lived over the shop, as his fathers had done before him; for the sake of his motherless child he had taken a house in the country—a small, red, sunny house, standing on a steep incline which overhung the Crompton Road, about a quarter of a mile from Oxhills; and there little Lois had thriven as she would never have thriven in the town.

Stephen Ireby was born after the great Evangelical Revival and before the Tractarian Movement; consequently he belonged to that type of Churchman which was alike

the effect of the one and the cause of the other. He was in the fullest sense of the word a mystic. Had he lived a few centuries earlier, he would have been a cloistered saint, obedient to heavenly visions in some secluded monastery; had he lived half a century later, he would have found rest for his soul in one of the vital religious movements of the present day. As it was, the spiritual stagnation of his time was abhorrent to him, and he was for ever struggling against the dead formalism which threatened to engulf the Church of England after the death of Wesley and Whitfield and before the coming of Keble and Newman.

For many years he had acted as a lay-preacher, carrying the tidings of salvation into the remote country villages of West Mershire, and into the dark places of the Black Country. And dark places indeed they were in those days, when the nail-makers and iron-workers were little better than savages.

It was once when he was quite a young man, and was fulfilling the duties of a lay-preacher, that a strange thing happened to him: at least people generally considered it strange—to Stephen himself it seemed the most natural thing in the world. He had been preaching at a small village in the depth of the country, about ten miles from Silverhampton, where he had made an appeal to the well-to-do farmers of the place on behalf of their fellow-Christians in the Black Country, just then suffering great poverty on account of an exceptionally bad time of trade; and he was riding home alone through the muddy and deserted lanes and byways with the result of the collection in his pocket. As he entered a dark wood, through which he had to pass, a sudden qualm of such intense and unaccountable fear seized him that he alighted from his horse and prayed aloud for Divine protection. While he prayed his fears vanished as suddenly as they had come; he remounted his horse and rode on, supported

by an unusual sense of security and exaltation, until he safely reached home. Some years afterwards a noted criminal, who was awaiting execution in Merchester gaol, sent for Mr. Ireby. Stephen went to him at once, being accustomed to similar calls; and the man made the following confession:

"It is well-nigh twenty years since I lay awaitin' for you on your way back from preachin' at Mattingham, to knock you on the head and make off with the collection-money."

"I remember," said Stephen; "I had it with me in a leather bag in my pocket."

"Well, I made up my mind to fall on you as soon as you'd got into the Brown Coppice, and to pitch your body into the black pool in the middle o' the wood."

"Ah! I also recall a strange fear which took possession of me as I entered the coppice—evidently a premonition of danger."

"As soon as you'd got clear into the wood you downed on your knees and began prayin'—prayin' for your very life; but I thout nothin' o' that—I wasn't the chap to be frightened off by a bit of prayer, nor by a whole prayer-meetin', for that matter."

"Then why did you not fulfil your purpose?" asked Stephen, with much curiosity.

"I waited for you to end your prayer, and to come nearer to the place where I was hidin' down by the pool; but when you come near enough for me to see you a bit clearer (it were a very dark night, if you remember), I saw as there was two o' you—another man on horseback ridin' alongside o' you; and as I wasn't such a fool as to set upon two men single-handed, I just give up the job and made off the way I'd come."

This incident had made a great impression upon Stephen's mind; it had given him a firm hold upon the spiritual world—a consciousness of the nearness of the Divine Presence, until things which were unseen appeared to him

as things which are seen, and those that are not as those that are.

We are taught nowadays that miracles do not happen—that nothing, in short, happens save in obedience to what are called natural laws. But when one sifts the matter to its foundation, what is the difference between a miracle and a natural law? Each is but a fulfilment of the Will of God—an answer to that petition offered up daily by the Church of Christ that His Will may be done in earth as it is in heaven. The only real difference between the two is that the one is the exceptional and the other the ordinary method whereby God carries out His various purposes. The natural law has the sanction of custom; the miracle has not: but they are in truth equally arbitrary.

Yet men are so slow of heart to perceive this! They refuse to believe that He could turn water into wine at His Word; yet they take it as a matter of course that He should take the seed from the hand of the sower and change it into bread for the eater. They refuse to believe that He could put the shadow ten degrees backward, or stop the sun in his course in the valley of Ajalon; yet they accept without a murmur the fact that He sendeth that same sun from the uttermost part of the heaven unto the end of it again, and bindeth the sweet influences of the Pleiades, and looseth the bands of Orion. They refuse to believe in the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come; yet they feel no surprise when year after year the dead earth wakes to life again and puts on bridal apparel, while the mountains and the hills once more break forth into singing, and all the valleys shout for joy. And yet if God so clothes with a new body the grass of the field which to-day is and to-morrow is cast into the oven, shall He not much more clothe us of little faith? For all these phenomena—be they ordinary or extraordinary—are but the fulfilment of His Will, Who came that the whole creation might have life, and might have it more abundantly.

"Father, what does getting a new heart mean?" asked Lois, *à propos* of her conversation with Griselda on the previous afternoon.

Stephen put his arm round the girl, and drew her slender form on to his knee.

"It simply means hearing God call you and answering His Call."

"How does it happen?"

"Sometimes in one way, and sometimes in another. God calls one man by the voice of stately ritual, another by the voice of evangelistic preaching, and a third by the voices of nature and art and human love. He knows no limitations; and men err who endeavour to make limitations for Him when He has set none for Himself, but only for His children."

Lois was not altogether satisfied.

"But, father, can't you say that one Church is better than another?"

"There is only one Church, my child—the Church of Christ; and there is only one Creed—the Creed of Christendom; but there are many diverse forms of worship."

"Then can't you say one form of worship is better than another?"

"I do not think so. You can say one form of worship is better for *you* than any other: we all can and ought to say that, and to worship devoutly according to that form. But I do not think you have any right to say that one form of worship is best for other people; each man must decide for himself, according to his own nature and needs and limitations; always remembering that every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God: and every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God. That is the vital matter."

It was not long after this conversation with Stephen that the great change came to Lois; and it came not during the stately ritual of S. Peter's, nor in the ecstatic

emotion of one of her father's revival meetings. But one early morning in summer, when the hoar-frost of the feathery hemlock was yet white in the hedgerows, and the songs of the birds had scarcely lost the joyous lilt of spring, Lois went down into the garden to see whether the fruit-trees had budded and the rose-bushes had blossomed ; and there—as did another seeker of old—she met One, Whom she thought to be Nature, the gardener, calling to her by the many voices of summer—by the sound of bird and bee and murmuring stream. There was no speech nor language that could be translated into words ; but through all the music she could hear the dominant chord of joy and peace and immortality. Her soul was uplifted in wonder at the beauty around her and above her and beneath her feet—the beauty of cloudless sky and flower-strewn meadow and distant blue-robed hills. And then suddenly—how she could not tell—the knowledge was borne in upon her that this marvellous beauty was no impersonal and abstract loveliness, but the outer garment and expression of One Who was nearer to her than any human friend or lover could be, and Who had loved her even unto death. So close to her did He seem that she felt she could almost touch the hem of His Garment, and see His Hand uplifted in blessing as He passed upon His way. And she knew Him, and fell at His Feet, and worshipped Him.

CHAPTER IV

THE FIRST KISS

It seems to me that somewhere in my soul
There lies a secret self, as yet asleep :
No stranger hath disturbed its slumber deep—
No friend dispersed the clouds that round it roll.
But it is written on my fortune's scroll
That should some hand the chords of being sweep
To strike a certain sound, this self would leap
To fullest life, and be awake and whole.

—*Love's Argument.*

THE following year Griselda Gaukrodger grew up—that is to say, she celebrated her seventeenth birthday, turned up her hair, and donned long skirts. In the summer she paid a long visit to Oxhills, where she made friends with Conrad Clayton.

The Claytons were distant connections of the Gaukrodgers, so there had always been a certain acquaintance-ship between the two houses. But Tertius Clayton's religious views—or rather his want of religious views—formed a strong barrier to anything like intimacy between him and his Puritan relations, so that Griselda and Conrad had been thrown very little together ; and the latter was far too self-sufficient a youth to take the slightest interest in his immature female connections. But it was a different matter now that Griselda had turned up her wealth of golden hair, and had developed into an extremely pretty young woman ; and Conrad at once began to renew a friendship which had lapsed for a considerable number of years.

He had finished his career at Cambridge, having come out as Second Wrangler; and was now at home for an interval, before going to London to complete his legal education and to be called to the Bar. So he amused himself, for the time being, by paying frequent calls upon his elderly kinswomen at Oxhills, and by enjoying still more frequent walks in the surrounding country with his youthful kinswoman, their niece.

"I do not know whether we are justified," Miss Gaukrodger remarked one day, "in letting dear Griselda spend so much time in the society of an unbeliever."

She had no idea how much time dear Griselda did spend in that particular unbeliever's society; but she knew it was more than dear Griselda's father would approve.

"He is nevertheless a cultured youth, sister," said Miss Keren-happuch; "and his company is of educational value to the child."

"But it is false wisdom to nourish the mind that perisheth, at the expense of the immortal soul, Keren-happuch."

"That is so, sister; yet I confess I never met a young man of parts whose intellectual acquirements impressed me so deeply as do those of Conrad Clayton."

"And perhaps he and Griselda do not descant much upon sacred matters," suggested Miss Kezia.

Her opinion on the ways of young men and maidens had naturally great weight with her sisters, as proceeding from experience and not merely, as in their cases, from hearsay.

"Ah! I daresay that may be so," added Miss Jemima: "the young, doubtless, have other subjects than theology to occupy their minds and conversation. But still we are responsible to the Lord for the child's soul as long as she sojourns under our roof."

"And then there is Josiah," continued the elder sister; "I fear Josiah would not approve of the intercourse

between them, whatever subjects of conversation the young people might select."

"Josiah is not his sister's keeper," persisted Griselda's faithful champion with much loftiness of demeanour; "certainly we are not bound to give account to Josiah of all our goings-out and comings-in. It is no business of his whom we choose to invite to our house; and while Griselda is our visitor, she must associate with our friends. Besides, he need know nothing about it," she added, descending somewhat from her high estate.

Miss Kezia was not the first good woman who has expended much time and trouble in endeavouring to screen her best-beloved from her Creator and her male relations.

Milton expounded a profound truth when he wrote :

He for God only ; she for God in him.

It would surprise and probably confound a number of good Christians if they realized how frequently women take the men to whom they belong, as types of the God Whom they adore : so that men who are hard and stern and arbitrary are unconsciously bearing false witness, not against their neighbour but against their Maker; whilst those who are tender and loving and patient are unwittingly preaching Christ to their own households with a force and power never given to the spoken word.

Miss Kezia had her way, and Griselda was left to enjoy the society of Conrad to her heart's content. What blissful hours the two spent together in the meadowy uplands which lay between Oxhills and the overhanging crag of Tettleigh Wood! And what delightful walks they took in each other's company, through the picturesque village of Crompton and up the Holloway, and thence by the lanes to the old coach-road which led, through a

maze of greenery, to the high ridge where Baxendale Hall, like a red-coated sentinel, commanded the surrounding country.

That was in the days before Baxendale Hall had been burnt down for the third time, the strange story of which burning has been told elsewhere; and before the new road had been cut right through the solid red sandstone of Tettleigh Rock, in order to shorten the journey of the mail-coaches from the Midlands to the Western Sea. Nowadays the old high-road is silent and untrodden save by the feet of workmen going to and from their work in the fields, and of lovers mistaking its grassy pathway for the main-line to fairyland. But the coaches still rolled merrily along it in Griselda's youthful days, carrying the mails westward ho!—and the yellow carriages of the county-people came with more measured and stately pace, bringing the gentry to do their weekly shopping in Silverhampton town.

One never-to-be-forgotten afternoon Conrad and Griselda started for a walk from Oxhills to Baxendale Park, which was open to the public. There was no visiting between the Baxendales and any of the townsfolk; in those days the lines of social demarcation were far more clearly drawn than they are now, and the Baxendales were a noble and ancient house; but the very fact that such social demarcation existed was as gall and wormwood to Conrad Clayton, who, in his intellectual arrogance, considered himself the peer of any noble in the land.

As the two climbed the Holloway, and Baxendale Hall came suddenly into view, Conrad remarked:

"It is a fine old place. Have you ever been inside it, Griselda?"

The girl looked as much surprised as if he had asked her whether she had ever been inside Buckingham Palace.

"Oh, dear, no! of course not. How could I have been?"

"Your aunts might have visited with the Baxendales," explained Conrad loftily, though very well he knew they might not.

"My aunts visit with the Baxendales?" exclaimed Griselda, still dazed. "Why, the Baxendales wouldn't visit with anybody in Silverhampton; they are very great people indeed."

"I don't see what that has to do with it. There are plenty of people in Silverhampton quite equal to visiting with the Baxendales—myself for instance."

"But the Baxendales are county people," Griselda persisted.

"That is no reason why they should be entirely excluded from intellectual society."

There was a tone of bitterness in Conrad's voice which Griselda would not have been a woman had she failed to notice.

"Never mind them," she said soothingly; "what does it matter whether they visit with us or not?"

"It does matter, Griselda; it matters a great deal. Not that I should myself particularly care to be hail-fellow-well-met with people of that calibre" (this was a direct untruth; but Griselda accepted it as if it had been the gospel); "still I disapprove of the principle that the mere accident of good birth should set certain persons on a pinnacle above their fellow creatures."

But Griselda had the blood of law-abiding citizens in her veins; and, young as she was, she realized that social distinctions are an inherent part of all human societies.

"I don't see any hardship in the fact that we don't happen to be friends of the Baxendales. We have our own friends and they have theirs; and we can each be happy in our own way. Besides, there must be great people and little people all the world over."

"That is the trash talked by slaves, Griselda—by slaves and sycophants."

Griselda had not an idea what sycophants were : but she felt that she had been guilty of an indiscretion in speaking their language, and she repented accordingly.

"I am so sorry, Conrad ; I didn't mean to vex you."

"Still it does vex me to hear you upholding and standing up for old abuses in that way. You are as pretty as any of the Baxendale women, and I am far cleverer than any of the Baxendale men ; and yet they dare to look down upon us and consider us their inferiors. And why, forsooth ? Simply because our fathers were industrious enough to make fortunes, and their fathers were idle enough merely to inherit them."

"I see."

Griselda had learnt by immediate past experience to walk warily.

"Of course it isn't with the Baxendales particularly that I am quarrelling ; it is with what the Baxendales represent—namely the rotten state of society which makes it possible—nay, permissible—for one class to look down upon another. But I'll tell you what " (here Conrad threw back his handsome head, and flung his defiance at Baxendale Hall as he had flung it at Silverhampton Church more than a year ago), "I'll be even with them yet. A day shall come when people like the Baxendales will bow down to me, as now they expect me to bow down to them."

Griselda's large grey eyes were aglow with excitement and admiration.

"Oh, Conrad, how splendid you are ! I'm sure you'll be a very great man some day."

"I mean to be. And then you'll see how the Baxendales and folk of their kidney will come cap in hand to me !"

And Conrad laughed roughly at the mere prospect of the thing.

"Still, they don't know now how great you are going to be,

and I don't see how you can blame them for not knowing," suggested Griselda, with more wisdom than tact.

"I don't blame them for not knowing that I'm going to be their superior, but for not recognizing that I am already their equal."

"Oh, I see!"

Griselda again walked circumspectly.

"But I shall conquer in the end. I can work and wait; and I've health and brains and money—the three winning cards."

"I'm sure you'll succeed," cried the girl, borrowing some of his courage; then, with a qualm at her own audacity, she added in superstition rather than faith, "God helping you."

"I don't want God to help me, thank you," replied her companion with a sardonic smile. "I can manage very well without Him."

"Oh, Conrad!"

Words failed Griselda.

"I don't believe in a God at all, you know; and if I did, I would rather be independent of Him than invariably cringing to Him as Christians are. Do you think I want to share my triumph with an imaginary Deity? Not I!"

"But He is not imaginary, Conrad."

"So you say; but I think He is; and my opinion is as good as yours on a matter about which we each know absolutely nothing."

"Then do you mean to say you are not afraid of Him?"

Conrad laughed aloud.

"Not a bit! Why should I be?"

"Nor of the devil?"

"I don't believe in a devil any more than in a God."

"It must feel very independent and—and—comfortable not to believe," said Griselda timidly.

"It is—extremely comfortable and extremely independent."

"And do you mean to say you feel strong enough to stand alone and fight your own battles without God to help you?"

"Quite strong enough and quite clever enough: and, what is more, I mean to do it."

Poor Griselda, whose life hitherto had been overshadowed by the vain things which her parents had imagined, gazed enviously at the impious boy beside her, and regarded him as the embodiment of human wisdom and courage and strength.

"Then, if there isn't a God, who do you think made things?" she asked, waving her arm to indicate the beautiful world around her—the picture which had apparently appeared without a Painter, the poem which had presumably been penned by no guiding Hand.

And then Conrad proceeded to teach his too-apt pupil how easy it is for pictures and poems to paint and write themselves, and how simple for complex machinery to be automatic in its creation as well as in its action. Strong indeed is the belief of the unbeliever!

But Griselda drank it all in with admiration and wonder, and believed Conrad's denials of the truth as implicitly as she had believed her parents' distortions of it. It was the sort of evening when the mind is naturally quick to receive impressions—an evening when the air was heavy with the scents and sounds of summer and the sky was flooded with great waves of golden light. There are no sunsets in England equal to the sunsets of West Mershire—probably owing to the slight thickening of the atmosphere by the smoke of the Black Country; and the sunset on that particular evening was wonderfully beautiful, even for West Mershire. The sun had just dipped behind Baxendale Hall, leaving great tongues of crimson light behind him, until it looked as if the ancient prophecy were about to be fulfilled and Baxendale thrice burned down, but this time with fire from heaven; and great shadows lay upon the glinting

grass, like tender hands hushing the tired world to sleep. In the east the pale-faced moon gazed serenely over the pillar of cloud which overhung the Black Country; and the whole sky was broken up into lakes and rivers of rippling rosy cloud.

And the wonder of nature worked not only upon Griselda, but also upon her companion; for when the time came to say good-night at the little wicket-gate which divided the meadow-lands of Oxhills from the high-road, the spell of the summer fell upon Conrad and stirred his blood, so that, seeing Griselda's great beauty so close to his side, he bent his head and kissed her. And at his kiss all the womanhood in Griselda woke up so that it could never be put to silence any more for ever; and she knew that there would never again be any other human being in the world for her save Conrad, and him only.

As for Conrad, he walked on whistling softly to himself, and thinking what a very pretty girl Griselda was; but by the time he reached the old toll-gate on the Crompton Road, the thrill of the girl's presence had passed away, and he was again formulating the programme of his own ambition. The flirtation with his cousin had been very agreeable while it lasted, and had pleasantly filled up his leisure-time at home; but it must come to an end with his holiday, and he must give his great mind to matters more worthy of it.

But Griselda went home in a golden dream, and wrote that night in her little diary: "Conrad kissed me. The beginning of a new life for me."

Thus it came to pass that Griselda said good-bye to her childhood at the little wicket-gate, and became a woman.

CHAPTER V

ZADKIEL LEE

In the time when earth's foundations were not formed, and none
had laid them—

In the yesterday which came before creation's cycles seven—

There were seraphim who strove to stand above the Lord That
made them,

And who braved the curse of hell at last to win the crown of
heaven.

—*Love's Argument.*

THE next few days were wet—too wet to permit of any delightful walks on the part of Conrad and Griselda; and on the first fine day Conrad left home for a tour in Switzerland. By the time that he came back again, Griselda's visit to her aunts was ended and she had returned to Merchester. As for him, he had forgotten that kiss as if it had never been; but Griselda treasured it in her heart, and would so treasure it unto her life's end.

It had been arranged that after Conrad had enjoyed a holiday upon the Continent, he was to go up to London in order to study law; and in the interval between these two exits from Silverhampton he spent a fortnight at home.

It was during this fortnight, on one of those bright September mornings when summer comes back just to say goodbye to us once again, that Conrad went out walking, with his gun in his hand, into that far country, belonging to his father, which lay between the Northbridge road and the road to Mattingham. To anyone who had eyes to see, the view from that strip of land must have brought a message

too great and too wonderful to be translated into words. The ground sloped down in a sudden descent like an emerald waterfall, and then spread itself out into waves and billows of greensward, until it reached the bottom of the valley, where there lay a perfect garden of orchards and meadows and russet-tinted woods. Through this valley a silver thread marked the high-way which the river had made for itself; and on the other side, in the far blue distance, were ranged the ramparts of the everlasting hills.

Conrad had succeeded in potting a brace and a half of partridges and a few rabbits, when he suddenly came upon a gipsy-boy making off with a hare which had been caught in a snare and then killed.

Conrad's hand went up to the boy's neck and held him tight by the top of his jacket—for collar the child had none.

"Hold hard there! what are you doing with my hare?" he cried, shaking the trembling little form as he spoke.

The boy—a child of barely nine years—looked up with terror in his beautiful dark eyes.

"And may it please your honour, I was only carryin' off the dead body of a hare that I had just found in the field."

"The dead body of a hare indeed! Why, you young liar, the creature is warm yet! You killed it yourself just now—you know that you did."

The boy began to whimper.

"May it please your worship, I did nothin' of the kind. I heard the poor thing cryin' in a trap, and when I came up to see what was the matter, it was dead."

Conrad laughed.

"A likely story indeed! Who do you suppose sets traps on my property, except vagrant poachers such as yourself? You set the trap and you caught the hare, and it is useless to tell me any more lies on the matter."

The boy began crying in good earnest.

"Indeed, indeed I didn't, kind sir. I'm not a poacher—

indeed I'm not; and I'll never do it again if you'll only let me off this once."

"No, you certainly won't do it again for some time; for you'll spend the next few months in Mershire gaol, out of temptation's reach."

The child wriggled about in a vain attempt to fall on his knees at Conrad's feet.

"Oh! kind sir, do forgive me! My mother is a poor gipsy-woman, and it will kill her if you send me to gaol."

"Kill her or not kill her, to gaol you will go! You should have thought of that, you young vagabond, before you snared my hare."

At that moment the child's mother broke through the hedge and stood before them—a beautiful woman of the pure Romany type, with glorious eyes and curling black hair. In a moment she saw what had happened, and added her entreaties to her son's.

"Oh, sir, kind sir, don't send my poor little lad to gaol! It will be the ruin of him if you do. He's so young, he did not know it was wrong to trap the hare; and we were so hungry."

Conrad's lips curled in scornful amusement.

"You are by no means a skilful advocate, my good woman; you contradict yourself with every breath you draw. If the boy did not know it was wrong to trap a hare, how did the idea of trapping a hare come into his head at all? It strikes me he was too young to have thought of even that much by himself."

"So he was, sir, so he was."

"Then you should have trained him better."

"So I should, sir; that's quite true. But can't you punish me instead of him, considerin' that it was my fault settin' him on to do it?"

"The punishment will fall on you as well as on him."

The woman burst into bitter weeping, and fell on her knees at Conrad's feet.

"Oh, sir, kind sir, spare my little child to me this once, and I will train him to be an honest lad—I will indeed!"

"My good woman, you have not trained him to be an honest lad hitherto, so now the case is going to be taken out of your hands. The State will step in and fulfil the duty which you have so shamefully neglected."

The woman crouched on the ground moaning.

"Oh, sir, have pity on us! he is my only child, and his father was hanged for horse-stealin' three years ago—come Michaelmas."

"Then all the more reason why the State should remove the boy from such immoral surroundings."

"But he is my only child, sir; and he is such a bonny lad, too."

The woman rocked herself to and fro in her anguish, while the little boy cried silently.

Conrad shrugged his shoulders.

"You should have thought of all this before you trained him to be a thief."

"And we are goin' right away," the woman went on. "I and my people only camped out in Tettleigh Wood for one night; and by this time to-morrow we shall have taken to the road again, and shall never trouble you any more."

"All this detail is immaterial to me," replied Conrad in his hard, unmoved voice: "it is my duty to see that the laws of the land are kept, and that whoever breaks them is punished. Beyond that I have nothing to do with the matter."

"Are you not your brother's keeper?" cried a strange voice. "Before God, I believe that you are!"

Conrad started, and the gipsy-woman rose to her feet, as a tall old man sprang through the gap in the hedge and stood beside them. He was a weird and imposing figure, being considerably above the ordinary height, and wearing his white hair and beard much longer than was customary

His profile was like that of an eagle, and so were his black and piercing eyes.

Conrad raised his hat in tribute to this strange and imposing personality.

"May I inquire whom I have the honour of addressing?"

The old man bowed with equal politeness; in spite of his long hair and shabby garments, he was evidently a gentleman.

"You may, sir. My name is Philemon Gleave, and I am an itinerant preacher."

"And may I further inquire to what I am indebted for this uncalled-for inter—interview?"

The old man smiled at Conrad's adroit change of noun.

"By all means, sir. I conceive it my duty to preach the word in and out of season; and this appeared to me one of the latter occasions which I should do well to embrace."

"Allow me to express my regret that I cannot see the matter in the same light."

By this time the gipsy-woman, having recovered from her surprise at Gleave's sudden appearance, fell on her knees at his feet, beseeching him to intercede for her and her son, while the child continued his silent sobbing.

"Oh, sir, kind sir, do speak a word to this good gentleman for me and my little son! The lad trapped a hare, worse luck to him! but he didn't mean no harm; and yet the gentleman says he will send him to gaol for it—send my little Zad to gaol."

The stranger turned to the gipsy.

"What is your name, my good woman?"

"Zenobia Lee, sir."

"And the boy's name?"

"Zadkiel, sir; Zadkiel Lee."

There was an innate dignity about the stranger which soothed both the distracted woman and her child. Conrad, too, was conscious of it, although he struggled against it

with all his might; it was against his principles to pay respect to anyone so insignificant and misguided, according to his ideas, as a wandering preacher.

"May I trouble you, Mr. Gleave," he said, with some insolence, "to state what you have to say, and then to leave me and these persons to settle our own affairs?"

"By all means, sir," replied the stranger; "I will state what I have to say as briefly as I can, and then depart; in fact I have no time to spare, as I am preaching in the open-air this afternoon at Mattingham, and I have still a good way to go."

"Pray, do not let me detain you!" said Clayton, with a mocking smile. "Moreover I too have my duties, which, though obviously less important than the enlightening of the understandings of Mattingham, still render it undesirable for me to be kept here the whole of the day."

"My message to you is briefly this—the message that Moses gave to Pharaoh centuries ago: 'Let My people go that they may serve Me.'"

Conrad slightly raised his handsome eyebrows.

"I do not understand. Pray explain."

"I mean, show mercy instead of justice. For the sake of the God Who has shown mercy to you, do you in turn show mercy to this child and to his mother, and let them go in peace that they may serve Him."

"Pardon me, no God has ever shown mercy to me, nor should I thank Him for it if He had. I do not believe in a God at all; but if there is One, I merely ask Him for justice—the bare justice that I mete to my fellow-men."

The preacher raised his hand in warning.

"Beware, young man, beware! lest the God Whom I serve should take you at your word, and mete out to you the bare justice that you ask! Remember, if one man sin against another, the judge shall judge him; but if a man sin against the Lord, who shall intreat for him?"

"The Lord Whom you serve is a Myth; but I ask

nothing more than bare justice from Fate or Chance or whatever Power rules the world ; and if I can get that, I shall be thoroughly content."

The gipsy-woman here began to weep again.

"Will you have no mercy upon her?" the preacher asked.

"None ; I neither ask for mercy nor grant mercy. As I have said, if I can get what I deserve out of life I shall be abundantly satisfied ; and in return, what they deserve I give to others."

"Pardon me, sir, but I think you are making a mistake, and that if you persist in punishing this poor child you will live to regret it."

"I think that I am the best judge of that."

"Understand me, sir," continued Philemon, with unabated courtesy, "I do not suggest that the young vagabond should go altogether unpunished. As Solomon says, those who spare the rod spoil the child ; and I do not think that a sound beating here and now, from yourself or from me, would be anything but beneficial to the boy's moral health. But I do not think that, for one of the venial crimes of childhood, you have any right to compel this boy to become the associate of hardened criminals, who will probably end in making him a child of hell like themselves."

"The boy's sin was against me and my property, and therefore I repeat I am the best judge of what his punishment shall be."

"And you will condemn this child to a criminal's fate—possibly lose for him his immortal soul—simply because he caught a hare that happened at that moment to be running across your property?"

"I do not believe the boy has an immortal soul," sneered Conrad ; "and if he had, it is nothing to me what becomes of it—just as it is nothing to me in what society he spends the remainder of his mortal career."

"Yet if the snare had been set and the hare caught upon

the high-road, a few hundred yards from this very spot, you would have had no more right to punish the lad than I have?"

"I have nothing to do with that. The hare was killed upon my land, and it is every man's duty to look after his own."

"Young man, beware! again I say, beware! lest God should do unto you as you are doing unto this child."

Conrad smiled coldly.

"He is quite welcome to do so if He wishes. But, as I told you, I do not believe in a God Who spends His time in devising ingenious punishments for imaginary crimes."

"Neither do I, my dear sir. It seems to me that the retributive attitude of Divine Justice is a point upon which theologians have gone sadly astray. What men call God's punishments are as a rule nothing more nor less than Nature's consequences. For instance, you know that if you put your hand in the fire you will be burned. Is that God's punishment for putting your hand into the fire? Not so; it is merely Nature's consequence."

"Now, Mr. Gleave, you are speaking sensibly for the first time since I had the pleasure of making your acquaintance."

"This is a subject in which I am greatly interested, and on which I have oftentimes preached," continued Philemon, waxing warm in debate. "I hold that the Almighty does not intervene in human affairs so as to punish the wrongdoings of the sons and daughters of men; He merely refrains from intervention, and then the wrongdoings work their own punishment. Once and for all Christ intervened between our sins and their natural consequences; but if we refuse to avail ourselves of that Divine Intervention, He will stand on one side, and allow our sins to precede their own results in natural sequence."

"For which there is no necessity for any God at all?"

"Precisely so. I hold that God does not punish sin;

but that sin will punish itself if God, in His great mercy, does not interfere. Sinners are afraid of God's punishments; but I say that there are no such things: sin's punishments are what we have to dread, and it is God alone Who can deliver us from them."

"My dear sir, your theory is an admirable one, and one in which my judgment fully concurs. I therefore, being prepared to take the natural consequences of all my deeds whether sinful or otherwise, have no need of and no desire for the intervention of a Deity at all—which conclusion will, I think, end our interesting conversation."

But Gleave was not dismayed by the younger man's sneers.

"Nevertheless I must warn you that you are asking you know not what. 'Ephraim is joined to idols; let him alone.' Are you prepared to be let alone?"

"More than prepared—desirous."

Then the aspect of the stranger suddenly changed from that of a courtly old gentleman to that of an inspired prophet.

"Young man," he said, raising his hand to heaven, "be it unto thee even as thou wilt! The idols which thou hast made shall be ground into powder, and strawed upon the water, and given thee to drink—and bitter indeed shall be thy portion; the seed which thou hast sown thou shalt also reap—and terrible indeed shall be thy harvest; the measure thou hast meted shall be measured to thee again—and fear and desolation shall be the end thereof. Thou hast sold thy soul for principality and power, and principality and power shalt thou obtain. But because thou hast shown no mercy to this widow's son, God shall show no mercy towards thee. Thou shalt heap up riches, but thy firstborn shall never gather them; thou shalt make a great name for thyself, but thy firstborn shall not bear it after thee. And if thou shalt cry unto God for thy firstborn, He shall not hearken, forasmuch as thou hast not hearkened when this woman cried for her firstborn unto thee."

And then, before the young man had time to answer, Philemon Gleave vanished through the gap in the hedge, and strode with all his speed along the road to Mattingham.

"Fool!" exclaimed Conrad after a moment's silence. "As if I should be affected by his insane denunciations! Come along," he added, addressing the sobbing child, and again seizing him roughly by the neck; "I have wasted enough time over you already."

And leaving the gipsy-woman alone with her anguish, he turned his steps in the direction of Silverhampton, taking the now unresisting boy along with him; and he finally deposited the latter at the town-hall to await his trial by the magistrates.

Within a fortnight of that time Conrad Clayton had entered upon his new life in London; and Zadkiel Lee had been condemned to spend six months within the precincts of Merchester gaol.

CHAPTER VI

CONRAD GOES TO LONDON

He was rich in worldly wisdom, and he proved that it was better
To succeed in low endeavours than to fail in higher things—
To be earth's financial creditor than heaven's pardoned debtor,
And to hear the banknotes rustling than the rush of angel wings.

—*Love's Argument.*

FOR the next few years Silverhampton saw little of Conrad Clayton, and Griselda Gaukrodger saw him not at all. He spent most of his time in London; and on the rare occasions when he visited his father, Griselda did not happen to be at Oxhills. Consequently Conrad forgot her altogether in his new life with its broader interests.

But not so Griselda. Conrad had kissed her, and thus, she felt, had sealed her to himself for all time and eternity. Whatever happened, she was his and his alone: nothing could alter that. Whenever he wanted her she was ready to go to him; if he never wanted her, she was still ready, and would be to the end of her days. Therefore she did not fret nor chafe, as a more selfish woman would have done; she possessed her soul in a vast patience born of a still vaster love.

A great passion, as everything else that is really great, is always more or less touched with the light of immortality, and so does not fade under the shining of earthly suns. The true lover, like the true artist, is practically independent of the irritating cares and trifling annoyances which eat into the lives of meaner souls: the day of small things has never

dawned for him. Other men may worry themselves because of social slights and petty vexations and foolish misunderstandings: but for him such things do not exist. To him it has been given to stand for a moment upon earth's horizon-line, and to plumb time's depths by the golden measuring-reed of eternity; and he has learnt that there are no real unfairnesses and inequalities in the true life which lies above and beyond and around the life of shams and shadows: for the city of God lieth four-square, and the length and the breadth and the height of it are equal.

But in the city of men, which is called London, there is much that is unfair and unequal and by no means four-square; and it was in this city that Conrad dwelt for those crucial years which write an indelible mark upon the character of a man—those years when he finally leaves his boyhood behind him and attains to his full stature. In London—the most wonderful of all earthly cities—whatsoever a man seeketh that shall he find: the best and worst of everything is to be found in London. And Conrad did not seek the best; he set his heart upon worldly attainment and social success, and worldly attainment and social success became his. But of those things which are more than meat or raiment he neither thought nor cared; and therefore those things were not added unto him.

He made a point of only cultivating the society of such persons as would be of future use to him in his career, and consequently he succeeded in forming for himself what certain people would call “a nice circle.”

Among Conrad's most valued friends were a family of the name of Kirkpatrick—Irish people of blue blood, good position, and very small means. Colonel Kirkpatrick was an extremely peppery gentleman of the old school, who lost his money and his temper (with both of which he was but scantily equipped at the outset) on every possible

occasion ; and his wife had been one of the belles of Dublin in her day. But the member of the family who interested Conrad most was the eldest daughter, an exceptionally handsome girl a few years his junior. Everyone acknowledged that Kathleen Kirkpatrick was a beauty, but no one could discover whether she was very clever or very silly. In fact no one ever did find this out ; the secret died with her some half a century later.

Upon Kathleen Kirkpatrick Conrad placed his young affections—or rather that part of him which would have been the affections in a less cold and calculating man. She had beauty, which appealed to his senses, and rank, which appealed to his pride ; and although she had no money, he congratulated himself that her social position made it worth his while to wish her for his wife. And she really was very fair to look upon, with her curly black hair, her bright complexion, and her dark blue Irish eyes.

The Kirkpatricks lived in a quaint old house at Richmond ; and many pleasant hours did Conrad spend with Kathleen upon that river which is, in its own way, the most beautiful river in the world. Of course it is easy to find, if one goes no farther afield than Scotland, finer streams rushing through more impressive scenery ; but for pure, ideal, incomparable prettiness there is no river like the Thames.

Mrs. Kirkpatrick, being an Irishwoman, was easy-going in the matter of chaperonage, even in the days when unmarried women of forty were more strictly guarded than now are girls of eighteen. She had seven handsome and penniless daughters to marry ; so it did not behove her to be always present when eligible suitors were in the wind. Mrs. Kirkpatrick considered—and perhaps wisely—that the custom of looking after one's daughters is one of the many good old customs of which the breach rather than the observance is to be commended ;

and consequently Conrad and the fair Kathleen spent many delightful afternoons in a rickety old boat on the river.

During these excursions Kathleen grew to know Conrad very well, and Conrad to think that he knew her with an equally exhaustive knowledge. As a matter of fact he was but an amatory Isaac Newton picking up shells on the shore of the eldest Miss Kirkpatrick. Many men similarly resemble the great mathematician in this respect, if in no other; but mercifully the resemblance is not patent to themselves. If it were, there would be more women to wish they were married, and fewer men to wish they were not.

It was on one of these occasions that Conrad endeavoured to expound to his fair lady the extremely useful nature of the article known as money. If he meant finally to marry her, it was well, he felt, for Miss Kirkpatrick to realize the pecuniary value of the handkerchief about to be thrown to her.

"Well, now, and I don't see that money makes you any happier," retorted Kathleen, with a shrug of her shapely shoulders. "People with money always go wasting it in paying their bills; and they are no better off in the end than we are, who don't pay any at all."

"Then don't you pay any of your bills?" asked Conrad, with a smile.

"Not we. We couldn't possibly afford to pay them all, you see; and to pay some and not others would be just to cause jealousy all round; while if you treat everybody just the same, there can be no bad feelings at all. And that's the reason why I just accept all the men that propose to me, and never marry a single one of them. When they are treated all the same, nobody has a right to complain, and everybody's pleased. Oh! but jealousy's a horrid feeling, and it plays just the devil with a man."

"But does it never occur to you that it is hardly fair to buy a lot of things that you cannot pay for—hardly fair to the tradespeople themselves, I mean?"

"Why, that's just what I'm saying to you, if you'll only listen. It would be dreadfully unfair to pay some of them and not the others; but there's no unfairness in not paying any of them at all. It's just liberty, equality, and fraternity; that's what it is, and nobody has a right to grumble when everybody's treated the same. Why, you'd be just mad yourself if you'd been born with only one leg when everybody else has got two; but you never make a trouble that you're only born with one nose, because everybody else is in the same box."

Now this indifference towards the great lever of Mammon was not an attitude of mind altogether seemly in a young woman upon whom the honour of being invited to marry a rich man was about to be conferred. Not that Conrad loved wealth for its own sake, as did his father: he merely regarded it as one of the principal instruments whereby men gain the whole world and lose their own souls at the same time; and he valued it accordingly. Consequently he resented Miss Kirkpatrick's outspoken heresy with regard to this matter; for when we are ready to be graciously beneficent, it is extremely irritating for other people not to be equally ready to be humbly grateful.

"Perhaps I look at the matter from the tradesman's point of view," he said, somewhat stiffly; "my father happens to be a tradesman, as was his father before him."

Mingled with his irritation at Kathleen's indifference towards the thing which he was intending to offer her, there was in Conrad's mind the nobler anger of class-instinct. With all his faults he was entirely free of the crowning baseness of being ashamed of the class from which he had sprung; he might be a tyrant, but he was not a snob. Snobbishness is peculiarly the attribute of little minds; and there was no trace of littleness about either Conrad's virtues or his faults.

Kathleen dabbled her pretty fingers in the water through which the old boat was slowly drifting.

"Oh, but how funny to have a tradesman for a father and a grandfather! But I'm not sure that I should like it, all the same. If my grandfather had been a tradesman, I'd just have cut him off with a shilling, and never let him spend any of his own money at all."

"I am proud of belonging to the middle class," replied Conrad shortly; "I do not understand why it is more honourable to be descended from military robbers than from honest buyers and sellers."

Kathleen, perceiving that he was really annoyed, proceeded to smooth him down.

"Oh! but I think it must be great fun, too, to live in a dear little room behind a shop, with a door that rings a bell whenever you open it, and to spend your time in matching wool!"

"As it happened, my people did not sell Berlin wool; they made and sold iron goods."

Conrad was still angry, but the girl was not a whit abashed.

"Then I'd just as soon sell mouse-traps as fancy wool-work; they are every bit as nice in their own way."

There was a few moments' silence, while Conrad gradually simmered down, and thought how utterly foolish Kathleen was. It would be absurd to quarrel with anyone as silly as she: and if there were some doubt as to her brains there was none as to her beauty. Then he said:

"What a glorious day it is! The Thames is at its best in June."

"And so it is, and especially on a Sunday afternoon. Isn't it funny that the sun always seems to know that Sunday is a day of rest, and so shines all the harder? Sundays seem finer than other days, don't you think?—except, of course, when they're wet. And yet English people are so stupid, they spend most of their waking hours on Sunday in going to sleep after dinner. And it is so silly, and such a waste of time to do nothing

on the one day in the week when they've got nothing to do."

"I wonder if we ought to be going home again," remarked Conrad, seeing how long the shadows were growing; "it is getting late."

"And sure we ought," replied Kathleen, with a sigh; "it gets late so early when one is enjoying oneself. And as I haven't got one of the girls with me, you must take me home in good time, for it is never late that mother will let me be when I'm out alone."

"Well, anyway, we've had a charming afternoon."

"It's been just delightful, and such a nice talk together, too. I always like talking to you, Mr. Clayton, because I listen to what you say; and I don't always forget it afterwards."

"Then you are apt to forget things, Miss Kirkpatrick?"

"I should just think I am; it's no memory at all that I've got. I wish I could remember a quarter of things that I have forgotten, and I'd just tell you about them to make you laugh."

"There are some things, perhaps, that are best forgotten," remarked Conrad drily.

"Sure, and that's true. Why, if you can remember to forget a man now and then, he thinks all the better of you. I've found that out. But there's no one got such a memory as I've got, except all the rest of us. Why, we've just got no memories at all. Sure, we'd have forgotten our own name if we hadn't changed it on coming into my uncle's property, which we never got at all because we spent it all on a lawsuit before we came into it; and so our own name isn't our own name at all, but something quite different."

And the talk flowed on as easily as the river, until Conrad deposited Miss Kirkpatrick at her own front door.

CHAPTER VII

KATHLEEN MAVOURNEEN

But some time in the coming years
I hope that you may build a shrine,
And have it hurled about your ears
As you have dealt with me and mine;
And meet, when like myself deluded,
With "Mrs. Be-done-by-as-you-did."
—*Verses Wise and Otherwise.*

It was not until his life in London was nearly at an end, that Conrad decided to ask Kathleen to become his wife. He was a cautious young man, who would never act upon the impulse of the moment; and although he had intended for some time to marry Miss Kirkpatrick, he gave the matter every possible consideration before arriving at an ultimate decision. And this decision was not altogether an unwise one.

He loved Kathleen as much as it lay in him to love anyone or anything outside the master-passion of his life—his desire for power. Her beauty charmed his eyes, and her Irish accent his ears; while her ceaseless prattle amused him, without being the least strain upon his intellect. Conrad was the type of man to whom cleverness in a woman never appeals. He was too dominating, too self-confident, ever to be influenced by feminine counsel; and so the capacity for administering such counsel, merely served to irritate him. To him a woman would always be something between a slave and a plaything; and intellectual superiority is not a desirable qualification in dependants or

in toys. But it is nearly always good for a man to marry a woman who is socially his superior. It gives her an influence over him, in minor details, which nothing can gainsay. Let the wife dutifully obey her husband in all the weightier matters of the law; let her submit her judgment to his in all questions connected with Church or State; let her unquestioningly do his bidding in the great issues of life: for, if he is in any way worthy of her, he will most assuredly know better than she. But let her beware of allowing him to intermeddle in purely social matters; for the male creature has yet to be born who can interfere in a social arrangement without completely spoiling it. What married woman does not know to her bitter cost the utter unsuitability of the one couple whom her husband insisted upon introducing into an already symmetrical dinner-party? What single woman has ever accepted a man's invitation, unseconded by his wife, without finding herself either *de trop* or else bored to extinction? Society is one of the few realms wherein Woman is superior to her lord and master; and yet he will never realize this—nor can he be expected to realize it—unless his wife has her own acknowledged status in the sphere where she claims to be his leader. A man may love his wife with all his heart, and reverence her with his whole nature; but, if she be the product of a lower social stratum than his own, she will never to the day of her death convince him that his manners are growing a little rusty for want of use, or that he had better change his tailor. And yet even the best and the best-born of men are none the worse for a certain amount of feminine supervision over both their ways and their wardrobes.

The occasion which Conrad selected as suitable for the making of his offer of marriage, was a ball at the house of a wealthy magnate in Russell Square. He arranged in his own mind beforehand that at this particular party he would

propose to Miss Kirkpatrick and she would accept him; and when he met Kathleen in the ball-room on the eventful evening, and saw that she was looking more lovely than her wont in a diaphanous gown of white tarlatan trimmed with sky-blue forget-me-nots, he felt that she had dressed for the part and was prepared with her cues; and the feeling afforded him unbounded satisfaction—which satisfaction was augmented as the evening wore on, and Kathleen was universally acknowledged to be the belle of the ball.

They had danced several dances together and were sitting one out, when Conrad opened the attack by remarking:

“Do you know, Miss Kirkpatrick, that I am very happy this evening?”

“Well, and so you ought to be at such a lovely party as this. Did you ever hear such a band, or such a floor, or such gowns in all your life; for I never did for sure? And the people are all so nice. Why, there’s only two that ought not to have been invited, and that’s the host and hostess themselves; and I don’t very well see how we could have left them out.”

Conrad smiled indulgently at what he considered the girl’s charming ingenuousness.

“Oh! yes, it is a very good ball, there is no doubt. But it was not to the entertainment itself I was alluding when I said I was so happy; it is something else than the band and the floor and the dresses that makes me enjoy myself. I wonder if you can guess what?”

“Not I. I never guessed an answer to a riddle in my life, and whenever I did it was always the wrong one.”

“Aren’t you happy, too?”

“I should just think I am! I don’t remember ever having been so happy before, except once, and I’ve forgotten when that was.”

“And what is the reason of your special happiness to-night? Tell me, Kathleen.”

It was the first time he had ever called her by her Christian name, and Conrad threw a world of expression into the dissyllable.

"Why, because father isn't here, of course. He decided at the last moment he wouldn't come, just to punish us, because he'd been in a bad temper all day; so now we can dance with whom we like and as many times as they ask us."

Conrad reflected that ingenuousness carried to excess has sometimes the effect of a cold douche; but he persevered.

"Do you know, I am leaving London soon, Miss Kirkpatrick?"

"Are you then? And I wonder at it; for surely London's the nicest place in the world except Dublin; and Dublin's hardly up to London, taking it all round."

"I'm going to settle in the country, near Silverhampton, the town where I was born. My father lives quite near to the town itself; but I mean to take a place in the country. It is lovely country round there."

"Is it now? And you're wise to live in the country, for London and Dublin are the only towns fit to live in, and, as I've just told you, I'm not so sure about Dublin."

Conrad felt more cheerful; he was warming up again after the cold douche. He described at some length the beauties of Mershire, and the advantages of a resting-place in that region until he felt things were ripe for him to return to London and take up the thread of his life there. He intended—as he expounded to Miss Kirkpatrick—to make a name at the Local Bar before attempting to practise in the London courts, as he considered this the more rapid road to that success which he meant ultimately to be his. In conclusion he asked, again, with that unwonted tenderness in his voice:

"Should you like to live in the country for a time, Kathleen?"

The blue eyes opened wide in childish surprise.

"I? For sure not! Why should I? Why, it's just dead of dulness that I'd be!"

Yes, extreme ingenuousness was distinctly chilly; there was no doubt of that. But Conrad was a strong man, and so was not to be easily daunted when once he had set his mind upon a thing.

"Oh! dear no, you wouldn't," he answered gently; "you might find it a little dull at first, but you'd soon get used to that."

"No, I shouldn't, however long I lived. Why, if I lived in the country till I was ninety, I'd never get used to it; but I'd just die of dulness before I was thirty-five."

Conrad laughed in tender scorn.

"Not you, you foolish child!"

"Yes, I should. Why, I've lived in London all my life ever since I was born, and it hasn't been in London at all, worse luck! but only at Richmond, which is just the same thing, only not half as nice; but it's better than being right in the country, and we can come up to London as often as we wish, and that's not half as often as I should like."

And Kathleen sighed.

"Believe me, you are wrong. You have never lived in the country, and I have; and I can assure you that there is a great deal to interest and amuse one."

"Oh! but you're a man, and that makes all the difference. When a man is at home he goes out all the time, but a woman doesn't, so it is much duller for her than for him."

"I do not mean, as I have already explained to you, to live in the country for the rest of my life," said Conrad, "but only until I have planted my foot with such firmness on the local legal ladder that I shall be sure of an established practice when I come back to London."

"And when you're a great man, you'll have to live in London, won't you? Because all great men live in London, or else nobody believes that they are great at all."

"I don't know that London is a necessary dwelling-place for great people ; but it certainly is for politicians."

"And it's a great politician that you'll be, for I've often heard you say so ! And I know you'll just be one of the grandest sort of all, that upset the old things and leave somebody else to put up new ones instead : and that's the kind that gets on splendidly."

"But I shall not go in for upsetting old institutions wholesale, though I own it will be my endeavour to take some of the power now monopolized by the aristocracy, and give it to the middle-class."

"Sure now, and fine fun that'll be ! Why, you'll be just like Wat Tyler killing William Rufus because the tax-gatherer called."

By this time Conrad felt that Kathleen had trifled long enough ; and he determined not to let her play with him any more, but to bring her to the point at once.

"Miss Kirkpatrick," he began, "I do not mean to live in my country home all by myself ; I mean to ask the woman whom I love to share it with me."

"Do you now ? And I don't blame you, for it's fine fun you'll have together in the little room behind the shop with the Berlin wool—no, I mean the mouse-traps ! And I expect it's a nice girl from Silverhampton that you'll be thinking of, and that you've kept up your sleeve all this time ! Well, then, give her my love, and tell her from me that you're the best company in the world on the river on a Sunday afternoon when there's nobody else to be got."

Conrad felt that charming simplicity should have its limits ; but he made up his mind not to be angry, so went on in a suave voice :

"I have told you, however, that what you are pleased to call 'mouse-traps' is only a temporary arrangement ; that eventually I intend to give up Silverhampton altogether and devote myself to public life in London."

"Well, then, and that'll be fun too! And the nice girl from Silverhampton can help you to kill the tax-gatherer"

Conrad began to get desperate.

"Kathleen, don't you know who the nice girl really is whom I am going to ask to share my home?"

"Faith, no! how should I? Why, it's nobody but women of quality that father has ever let us be friends with; for though the middle-class men may be just charming, which they are, it's not their mothers and sisters that the gentry can be intimate with."

Conrad made one more attempt to break through the net of cobwebs which Kathleen persisted in weaving round him.

"Do you mean to tell me, Miss Kirkpatrick, that you would refuse to marry a man simply because he belonged to the middle-class?"

Kathleen opened her lovely eyes wide in astonishment.

"Sure, I'd never have the chance, for it's not a man of the middle-class that would have the impertinence to take such a liberty with a Kirkpatrick as to ask her to marry him! And, besides, it's not time now that I'll have to marry anybody, for I've got engaged to Lord St. Just."

Conrad was silent for a moment. Then all the indomitable pride of him came to his rescue, and he said, with a smile:

"Allow me to congratulate you, Miss Kirkpatrick. I hope that you will be very happy, and I am sure that Lord St. Just will be so. I regret that I have not the pleasure of his acquaintance."

"Oh, but he's just adorable! And you must have seen him, for he spoils half the parties in London by not being there. And I know all the time that he can't be as nice as I think he is, because nobody could, and that only makes him seem all the nicer."

Conrad did not leave off smiling.

"And I trust that you are not making a mistake?"

"Well, and if I am, what does it matter? I'll have the rest of my life to correct it in; and there's no fun at all in correcting the mistakes that you've never made."

Conrad rose.

"Our dance is over, alas! I can hear the band striking up for the next. Thank you very much for past mercies. Allow me to express a wish that your affection for Lord St. Just—now so extravagant—will stand the test of years!"

"Sure, and it will," replied Kathleen, rising also and taking his proffered arm, "for I shan't try it, you see; and it's untried affection that lasts the longest, as the clothes wear the best that you never put on. So Lord St. Just and I will see each other after we're married as rarely as we can; and the less we see of each other the more we shall want to see, so that we shall be the happiest couple on both sides of the Irish Channel; and it's both sides that we'll be on most of our time—he on one, and me on the other."

"And as for the numerous hearts that you have broken?" suggested Conrad pleasantly, as they walked across the ball-room.

"Oh, it's soon enough that they'll be mended!" laughed the triumphant young beauty; "though the hearts that have never been broken are those that mend quickest of all."

"As I shall probably learn by experience," answered Conrad, as he resigned Kathleen to the care of her chaperone and passed on.

But as he went home that night he raged furiously against the girl for the slight which she had put upon him; and the fact that at some future time he would be, as he phrased it, "even with her," in no wise lessened his present mortification that she had dared to treat him precisely as

he had treated Griselda Gaúkrodger. Because, as Miss Kirkpatrick once remarked, "It is always annoying to discover that other people are quite as superior to you as you are superior to them"—a discovery which most of us have to make sooner or later.

Though she did not know of it, and would have repudiated it if she had known, Griselda was amply avenged.

CHAPTER VIII

CONRAD COMES BACK

Do you know that the sight of your face,
Though I see you each day of the seven,
Can transfigure the commonest place
Into something that seems to be heaven?
—*Verses Wise and Otherwise.*

AFTER he had been called to the Bar, Conrad fulfilled his intention to leave London and practise locally. In those days London was not as near to the Midlands as it is now. Birnam Wood had not yet taken to run in and out of Dunsinane at express speed, as it does, metaphorically speaking, at the present time, until centralization and civilization have become almost convertible terms : so that the Local Bar was a very lucrative calling for any young man who had also local interest to back him up, as was undoubtedly the case with Conrad Clayton. Therefore it was not long before he established a very fair practice in Silverhampton, Merchester, and the surrounding towns, and took to himself the lion's share of the work at the Merchester Assizes. He lived at The House that Jack Built, with his father, and he was so thoroughly sickened and disgusted by what he termed the hollowness and falsity of London society (by which he meant its doing unto him as he had intended to do unto it), that he smiled with unusual graciousness upon such provincial dissipations as Silverhampton and the neighbourhood afforded.

Moreover Griselda Gaukrodger paid frequent visits to her

aunts at that time, thereby recalling her existence to Conrad's truant memory ; and he was pleased to note that her beauty had acquired a depth of expression and of tenderness which greatly enhanced its charms—though that it was his own hand which had wrought this æsthetic change he was totally unaware. But he enjoyed it with the eye of appreciation—as indeed none had a better right to do than he, who had (though all unwittingly on his part) transformed Griselda from a pretty child into a beautiful woman. In her own style she was as lovely as Miss Kirkpatrick ; and although her manner was less finished than that of the fashionable young beauty, Conrad liked her none the less on that score : the burnt child is proverbially a dissenter from the form of religion established by Zoroaster.

And then Griselda worshipped him.

Some men like to do their wooing for themselves : they share the instinct of the cave-men, whose primæval form of love-making consisted in running after the woman who ran away from them the fastest ; and there is undoubtedly much to be said both for this primitive type of man and for the equally primitive type of woman who attracts him. But a modern civilization has produced another type of man—a man who is so busy making fortunes and improving commerce and governing states, that he literally has not time for the romantic chase patronized by lovers in the Stone-age. How can he be expected to waste hours, which might be valuably employed in coining money or standing for Parliament, in playing a game which was old-fashioned before King Alfred's reign, and in dancing attendance on the whims and caprices of a mere woman ? There is also much to be said for this type of man : as a mayor or an alderman he is ideal—as a railway-director positively idyllic ; but as a husband——? Well, he will always make most satisfactory settlements ; and on his second love as generously as on his first.

The existence in later days of this kind of man has

produced a corresponding kind of woman—a woman with no whims and no caprices, no fascinating incongruities and no delightful uncertainties,—a woman who will never tease and never exact, but who will be always there when she is wanted, and never when she is not; and who will, moreover, accept the fact that there are times, and legitimate times, when she is not wanted—a state of things in which the Stone-age woman never can and never will acquiesce. And why should she, seeing that she is the sort whom, if a man once wants, he will want always; who will amuse him for better and cheer him for worse; who will be the life of his dinner-parties for richer, and make a joke of small privations for poorer, till death do them part; who will tantalize him twenty times a day, but bore him never once in a lifetime; and who, in short, will interest and entertain him more than a score of directorships, with a seat in Parliament thrown him.

But the unromantic, latter-day man wants the unexacting, latter-day woman; and as a rule he finds her, and never knows that there is anything better.

Therefore it happened that Griselda's adoration was acceptable to the soul of Conrad Clayton. She was fair to look upon, which was a good thing; she was devoted to him, which was a better; and, which was best of all, she was to hand, and required none of the gymnastics of the Stone-age for the capturing of her. So Conrad decided to ask Griselda to be his wife at such time as he thought she had waited long and patiently enough to deserve the honour.

There is nothing so beneficial to a young man's character as the wooing of a woman who is hard to win. In the first place it knocks—no trifling overthrow!—all the conceit and affectation out of him; and in the second, it teaches him to offer, instead of to accept, incense—likewise a state of being conducive to the saving health of his soul.

With a woman, however, it is utterly different. Some women are made to be petted and some to be worshipped ; and the latter is by far the more salutary course of treatment for the normal female mind. The woman who is petted by a man, grows to think that she can do what she likes, and that all her faults and vagaries are pardonable, if not commendable. Little is expected of her ; so, with the marvellous adaptability of the feminine nature, she gives little. But the woman who is worshipped by a man, has all the cares and responsibilities of sovereignty suddenly thrust upon her ; *noblesse oblige* becomes unconsciously the rule of her life ; because the queen *can* do no wrong, the queen *must* do no wrong, else her very patent of royalty is meaningless and vain. She dare not give the lie to so great a faith ; because he thinks her perfect, perfect she must be. So in the end she verily becomes what he alone believed her to be in the beginning. The old legend repeats itself ; the statue, which a man carves by the hand of faith out of the block of ordinary human nature, becomes a living soul, responsive to and therefore worthy of the love which he has laid at her feet. But he never knows that the sovereign he serves was made in his own image and by his own hand ; he is too loyal a subject to doubt that her right was anything but divine. Yet *she* knows ; and for his sake rules well and wisely over the realm of which he has crowned her queen.

Although the adoration of Griselda was undoubtedly stimulating to Conrad's vanity, it naturally produced none of those desirable effects which a more difficult wooing would have produced. Kathleen had done him harm rather than good, as her bracing treatment of his self-love was counteracted by the fact that she had administered a cruel social snub rather than a salutary moral chastisement—and no man has ever yet been the better for a social snub, or ever will be. But Griselda mended so successfully the weak places in his armour of conceit which Kathleen

had pierced, that they became stronger than they were in the first instance—as is not infrequently the way with mended goods.

There was only one point on which Griselda did not see eye to eye with Conrad, and that was his estimate of Lois Ireby.

“I can’t think why you dislike Lois!” she said to him one day, when he had taken her for a country walk, about a year and a half after his settling down at Silverhampton.

“Can’t you? It appears to me obvious enough.”

“It doesn’t to me. In the first place Lois is so good; she is quite the best person I ever met.”

Conrad smiled.

“As I think you know, my dear Griselda, goodness is not an attribute which has charms to soothe my savage breast; in fact, its action is precisely the reverse—it irritates the breast to which we have just referred instead of soothing it—irritates it to a most astonishing extent.”

“Then does Lois irritate you?”

“Terribly!”

“But she’s so gentle, Conrad.”

“I know she is; that is what drives me mad. Gentleness is a quality which I absolutely detest; it is so undignified, so grovelling. People who are gentle and deprecating are a public nuisance. They give infinite trouble to others by their incessant apologies—which have to be accepted, alas! And they endanger the public health by their very humility.”

“How on earth can they do that?”

“Quite easily, my dear Griselda. Have you ever noticed when a gentle and deprecating person leaves a public assembly before the close, he or she invariably omits to shut the door, lacking the necessary courage for the act? Consequently the surrounding persons are exposed to an excruciating draught and to the catching of many unnecessary colds.”

Griselda laughed.

"Yes, that is so. I've often noticed it at religious services. The more devout and humble the people who go out, the more certain they are to leave the door open behind them."

"I never lend myself to the fascinations of religious services, I am glad to say; but sanctified human nature is evidently as troublesome there as in less spiritual haunts."

Griselda laughed again.

"How clever you are, Conrad!"

"Then your gentle and deprecating persons are always, as I said, apologizing for their very existence. Now, why apologize to me for a thing which I regret as much as they do, but for which neither of us is in any way responsible? Personally, I had much rather they had never been born, I admit; but personally I was never consulted."

"Then Lois is so sweet," persisted Griselda.

Even her consuming passion for Conrad had not yet burnt all the obstinacy out of her.

"Now if there is one thing upon earth that I detest more than another it is what people call 'a sweet woman.' Yes, I certainly agree with you that Lois is sweet—sweet to the very consistency of syrup."

"But, Conrad, you don't like disagreeable women who are always arguing?—I've often heard you say so."

"Of course I don't; but I like a woman to agree with me because her judgment is convinced that my view is the right one, not from any nauseating endeavour to render herself agreeable."

Conrad really believed this statement about himself; he also believed that he knew the difference between the two forms of feminine acquiescence!

"And then Lois is so ugly," he added, as an afterthought.

"Oh no ! not ugly," Griselda expostulated. "She isn't what you would call pretty, I know ; but no one could be ugly with her angelic expression."

"Still, I maintain that she could be—and is."

"And she has such pretty eyes."

"I don't like women with brown eyes ; a woman's eyes should be either grey or blue."

"But her eyes are pretty, even if you don't care for the colour ; you must admit that."

"Oh ! I daresay they are pretty eyes in their way. But it isn't her eyes or her hair or any special thing about Lois that I think so hideous : it is her sickly appearance ; and I do hate a sickly woman."

"Of course she has always looked delicate," Griselda admitted, "because she has always been delicate."

"I know that, and that is why I don't like her."

Griselda opened her large grey eyes in amazement.

"Don't like her because she is delicate ? Oh, Conrad, what a funny reason for not liking a person !"

"Well, it's a good enough reason for me. I never like delicate people, and never shall. I detest disease in any shape or form ; it is revolting to me ; and to my mind no woman is beautiful who is not in perfect health."

"Of course people don't look as pretty when they are ill as when they are well."

"My dislike goes deeper than that ! It is not merely that they don't look as pretty—which undeniably they don't ; but their delicate appearance is a sign of an underlying unhealthiness, and anything that is not perfectly sound and healthy repels and revolts me."

"Then you'd never fall in love with a delicate woman ?"

Conrad shook his head with vehemence.

"Good heavens, no ! I'd die sooner !"

"But supposing you loved a strong person and she became delicate afterwards ?" suggested Griselda timidly.

"Then I should leave off loving her," replied the man

without the slightest hesitation. "She would become positively repulsive to me."

"But wouldn't your pity for her make you love her more?" the girl pleaded.

"Certainly not! The love that is akin to pity is, to my mind, a morbid and unhealthy sentiment. Love is really nothing but the supreme form of admiration; and when admiration becomes impossible, love dies."

Griselda sighed. They were just then at the top of the Holloway; and as she looked downwards a shadow stole across the valley, and the world seemed dark.

"I hate weakness of any kind," continued Conrad, as they walked down the hill; "it is the one thing in the world that I cannot endure. Weakness of intellect, weakness of purpose, weakness of body are alike contemptible, and I despise them equally."

There fell a silence between the two as they slowly descended into the valley. Then Conrad suddenly said:

"Griselda, I want to ask you something. Will you be my wife?"

Griselda stood still for pure joy; for a second she could neither speak nor move. The cloud passed from before the face of the sun, and once more the whole valley was filled with light.

"Griselda, will you marry me?" Conrad repeated.

Not that he was in any doubt as to the answer; he knew well enough that he was stretching out the sceptre to the most humble and grateful subject that ever bowed before a monarch; and such knowledge is not good for a man.

The girl looked up at him with all her heart in her beautiful eyes.

"Oh, Conrad! do you really mean it?"

"Of course I do. Men don't say things of that sort in jest," replied Conrad, with a laugh.

How much more seemly was this way of receiving his

addresses than that adopted by Miss Kirkpatrick ! He was decidedly pleased with Griselda.

"But, Conrad, I am not half good enough, nor half clever enough for you."

"I don't happen to want a clever or a superior wife."

It would never have occurred to Conrad to contradict what seemed to him Griselda's plain statement of fact ; that any woman was too good for him, was an idea which would never have entered his well-balanced mind. Some men go wooing in a spirit of profound humility and with a sense of absolute unworthiness, and are all the better for it for the rest of their lives—as their wives are all the happier. But of such was not Conrad Clayton.

"Oh, Conrad ! it seems too good to be true for such a clever man as you are to want to marry me, who am quite stupid and not clever a bit."

"You will just suit me, Griselda. A brilliant woman would have bored me inexpressibly. I want a wife who will help me in my career—not one who will expect me to help her in hers."

"And I will help you, Conrad ; I will indeed."

"I am sure you will, Griselda. You must always remember that the ruling passion of my life is ambition, and therefore that any woman who came between me and my ambition would eventually forfeit my love. A man cannot serve two mistresses any more than two masters ; so the woman who wants a famous husband must be content to keep herself somewhat in the background."

"But then, on the other hand, the great man pays a woman a far higher compliment in asking her to marry him than the small man could ever pay her !"

"Of course he does, Griselda ; that is a most proper way of looking at things. And when I am a great man—as I shall be some day—you will bear in mind that you are one of the few women to whom that compliment has been paid."

Griselda looked up at him with worshipful eyes.

"I shall never forget it, you may depend upon that. And I will promise never to stand in your way, nor hinder you in your career, as long as I live—never, never, never!"

A promise which Griselda most faithfully kept.

By this time the two had reached the little wicket-gate which led into the Oxhills meadows; and here, as once years ago, Conrad stooped his handsome head and kissed Griselda on the lips before they parted and went their separate ways—he to make plans for a successful future, and she to dream dreams of unspeakable bliss.

And he had not once told her that he loved her! But it never occurred to either of them to notice the omission.

CHAPTER IX

GRISELDA DECIDES FOR HERSELF

What right had'st thou to take a piece of delf,
A worthless clod,
Made in the image of thy sordid self,
And call it God?

—*Love's Argument.*

WHILE Griselda was walking through fairyland, Lois also was treading on enchanted ground.

A new doctor had come to live in Silverhampton—John Stillingfleet by name; and Stephen Ireby had consulted him about Lois, with the consequence that the girl's fragile appearance, coupled with her sweetness and piety, so powerfully appealed to the man whose calling it was to help and to heal, that he speedily lost his heart to her.

And Lois learned to love him, too, in her quiet way, though love would never be to her the absorbing passion that it was to Griselda. She was one of those women, tender rather than passionate, in whose natures affection has always a strong maternal element. As a rule she did not care for men, and they did not care for her; they found her dull and called her dowdy. With women she was more at home, though even they did not consider her worthy of much trouble on their part. But with children she was at her best; they adored her, and she loved them with a patience and devotion that never failed nor grew weary. In the society of children she was almost beautiful, with that calm, Madonna-like beauty which soothes rather than

stimulates, and is restful rather than alluring. When she was young, no man save John Stillingfleet ever wanted her as a wife ; but as she grew older, few men saw her without thinking how perfect she must be as a mother, with the light of a great peace always shining in her soft brown eyes.

Dr. Stillingfleet was her senior by twenty years ; but Lois was so grave and staid for her age that the disparity between them was hardly noticeable. Their wooing was very simple, very straightforward. Lois had no ups and downs, as more wayward women have. The doctor was a religious man and a good Churchman, and her father approved of him : that was enough for her. But he did not stir the slumbering soul in her, as Conrad had stirred Griselda's ; that awakening was to come later, and to be wrought by another hand than John's. Her chief feeling for him was gratitude —gratitude that he should have considered her worthy of his love, and thus given her her rightful place in the kingdom of womanhood. Like all unattractive women, Lois greatly exaggerated the power and influence of attractiveness : and she herself was not as unattractive as she imagined.

There are some people who are like a tune which we hear and straightway forget ; half an hour after we have first heard it we could not sing it to save our lives. Yet, after a time, the air gradually unfolds itself in our memory ; we hum bits of it to ourselves, and in a week we can sing the thing right through without a mistake. And of these was Lois Ireby.

Stephen was specially pleased at his daughter's betrothal, as things were not going very well with him just then. He had always been more of a scholar than a man of business, and consequently business gradually departed from the old shop in King's Square. It was therefore a relief to him to feel that his child was, to some extent, provided for, although Stillingfleet was far from being a rich man.

John had no private means at all, and only a very small practice; but he was a few years younger than Ireby and a great deal stronger, so that Stephen felt that his future son-in-law would be able to stand between Lois and poverty, should the shop in the square continue its downward career.

It was arranged that, for the sake of economy, Stephen should once more live over the shop—as he had done in his early days, and as his father and grandfather had done before him—and that Lois should stay on, after her marriage to Dr. Stillingfleet, in the little red house on the Crompton Road, with the row of poplar trees in front.

But although Cupid had brought peace and happiness to the little red house, he had introduced civil warfare into the camp of the Gaukrodgers.

When Mr. Gaukrodger was first informed that Griselda intended to marry Conrad Clayton, he simply forbade the thing and put it out of his mind. That was the end of it as far as he was concerned. According to Josiah's ideas, a man's children were his good and chattels; he could do with them whatsoever he pleased, and he was answerable to no one for the way in which he ruled a realm over which Providence had crowned him a solitary and indisputable despot. He held that as God could deal with him, so could he deal with his children. That almighty power apart from almighty wisdom would be an evil rather than a good thing, did not occur to him. God did not deign to explain His judgments to the children of men, and therefore Josiah did not deign to explain his judgments to his children; but he did not quite realize that to attribute to himself the infinite wisdom and love and knowledge which he attributed to his Maker, demanded a blind credulity on the part of the young Gaukrodgers which they could hardly be expected to possess.

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But to Mr. Gaukrodger's unbounded amazement, his daughter declined to submit to the fiat which had gone forth; and announced that her intention to marry the man she loved was unchanged by the parental interdict.

For the first twenty years of her life Griselda had been an ideal daughter, and had gone almost to the length of making a fetich of the Fifth Commandment. She had never acted, nor spoken, nor even thought if she could help it, otherwise than as her parents directed. Their thoughts had been her thoughts, their ways her ways. In those early days, had the accusing angel swept clean every corner of Griselda's pure and timid little soul, not one shadow of undutifulness or disobedience would he have found therein. But when Conrad woke her up to life and womanhood, all this was changed. His first kiss broke asunder the bonds of filial subjection which had held her so long a willing captive; and parental authority was henceforth to her an exploded doctrine—an extinct force.

"Griselda," her father said on the last occasion when he ever spoke to her upon the subject, "do you understand that in touching the accursed thing and yoking yourself in fellowship with an unbeliever, you are sinning against the living God?"

"No, father; I only understand that I love Conrad Clayton with all my heart, and that whenever he calls I must follow."

"Blind girl!" thundered forth Josiah. "Are you so besotted with the temptations of the flesh and the devil that you cannot see whither your steps are tending? Know you not that when this infidel gets hold of your body and soul, he will make you tenfold more a child of hell than himself; and that God will surely bring you to judgment for your deadly sin in choosing darkness rather than light? Is mere earthly happiness of such moment to you that you will buy it at the cost of your immortal soul?"

Griselda held up her head proudly.

"Father, I cannot allow even you to say such things against the man whom I have chosen."

"What? Shall my own child dare to reprove me? Shall the clay say to him that fashioned it, What makest thou? And shall you venture to argue and reason with the father who stands to you in the place of God?"

"Yes, for I do not believe in the God Whom you worship. I do not believe there is such a Being at all; and if there were, I wouldn't worship Him if He is as cruel as you say He is."

"Then let your blood be upon your own head, and go your own way to the perdition which you have chosen! But understand that for this thing I shall never forgive you, neither will God ever forgive you. You cease to be my child as you cease to be His."

"I cannot help it, father,—I must marry Conrad, whatever you say; and it cannot be so very wicked to love another person so much."

"But I say it is wicked, grievously wicked, to allow carnal affections to stand between you and your Maker. Human love is a snare of the evil one, and must be uprooted out of the soul at all costs."

But Griselda stood firm.

"I do not believe it. Human love must make people better instead of worse."

"That is a lie invented by the father of lies. Human love, like all other human joys, is a snare of the devil, invented for the undoing of the sons and daughters of men. But God in His Almighty Wisdom has seen fit to appoint you to wrath, and to blind your eyes to your own destruction. He has hardened your heart as He hardened the heart of Pharaoh; and if He elects to destroy your soul, none can let or hinder Him. But woe is me that He should have appointed my one ewe lamb to be a child of perdition! The Lord's Hand is heavy upon

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me in this matter ; but it is not for a sinful worm such as myself to question His doings, or to strive by searching to find out God."

It did not occur to Mr. Gaukrodger that it was not the Lord's Hand, but his own, which had guided his one ewe lamb so zealously in the way that leadeth to destruction ; and which had blinded her young eyes and hardened her tender heart until she had no alternative, poor child ! but to shrink in horror and fear from the God That her father had created in his own image, and then commanded her to worship.

"Go from my sight !" exclaimed Josiah, as Griselda quitted the room,—“go, and never let me look upon your face again ! God do so to me, and more also, if ever I forgive you your sin against Him, or if ever I again regard with tenderness or compassion a child who has so wantonly disobeyed His Laws and trampled His Commandments underfoot !”

But all her father's invectives dismayed Griselda not a whit. Hers was a nature that had only room for one idea at a time ; and just now the thought of Conrad filled every nook and crevice of her soul, so that she not so much disobeyed her father as totally disregarded him.

She was married on a dull autumn morning from her aunts' house at Oxhills. Mrs. Gaukrodger and her sons came over to the wedding ; but Josiah was not present, nor did he ask any questions concerning the ceremony. His wife submitted to him in this as in all other matters, and never ventured to give any information unasked : for Mrs. Gaukrodger was of that worthy and wifely type of woman who never presumes to question the wisdom of either God or man, and who would as soon think of criticizing the one as the other.

About a week before Griselda's wedding, Lois was married to John Stillingfleet, and settled down with him in

the little red house on the Crompton Road ; while Stephen Ireby took up his abode, as arranged, over the shop in King's Square.

Conrad took Griselda to Switzerland after their marriage, and then brought her home to a charming old house which he had, to his great delight, succeeded in securing. It was a square house, of that rich red Mershire brick which in time becomes a lovely rose-colour, situated on an eminence between the Tettleigh and the Crompton Roads, about a mile and a half from the town. On the one side its meadows sloped down to the canal at Tettleigh, and on the other to the garden behind the Stillingfleets' house, so that Griselda and Lois could interchange visits without going outside their own domains at all.

Mrs. Gaukrodger and the boys often came over from Merchester to visit Griselda in her new home ; but her father never came, nor did he make any enquiries about her from the others. To him she was to all intents and purposes dead.

Nevertheless the neighbours noted that about this time Josiah Gaukrodger began to be an old man. His sturdy figure stooped from its original stiffness, and his black hair became thickly streaked with grey ; and—still surer sign of age !—he was less absolutely certain than he had hitherto been that he was right, and everybody else wrong.

Yes, there was no doubt that the revolt of Griselda had left its indelible mark upon Mr. Gaukrodger ; yet he never mentioned his daughter's name even to his wife. But there were dark days, known only to himself and his Maker, when Josiah's heart was flooded with a passion of tenderness towards his firstborn child, and when he wrestled, as with the powers of evil, to crush and stifle his fatherhood for ever, as he would have cut off his right hand and plucked out his right eye had they thus offended. And there were darker days still, when he fell on his knees

before God, and prayed with bitter tears that the Lord would even yet have mercy upon his daughter and turn her from the error of her ways. And there were darkest days of all, when he writhed upon the ground in unendurable anguish, and, with that instinct of the necessity of expiation inherent in every living soul, besought that he himself might bear the punishment of Griselda's sin, in order that Griselda's soul might be saved alive.

And all this time Griselda was drinking so deeply of the cup of earthly bliss that she thought but little about her own people and her father's house; and about that father himself, who was ready not only to die but to be damned for her, she thought not at all.

CHAPTER X

CONRAD GOES TO INDIA

I deserve to be beaten with heavy rods,
For I might have known
That their sorrows are many who make them gods
Out of wood and stone.

—*Verses Wise and Otherwise.*

GRISELDA had been married for nearly a year when a bombshell suddenly exploded in the midst of her happiness.

She and Conrad were sitting in their lovely old orchard one summer evening, when he said in that calm voice of his, which hardly ever varied whatever he might happen to be saying :

“ By the way, Griselda, I have some good news for you.”

Griselda’s face lighted up ; anything which pleased her husband was good news to her.

“ What is it, darling ? ” she asked.

“ I have been offered a brief in an important case which is about to be tried in India. Wilkins and Slack, a firm of solicitors whom I knew when I was in London, have written to ask if I will go out on their client’s behalf and undertake the case ; they of course pay all my expenses, and give me a very handsome fee as well.”

“ Oh ! ” The light had died out of Griselda’s face, and the colour too.

But Conrad was not the sort of man to trouble his head about the fluctuations of his wife’s complexion, so he went on unheeding :

"It is a most splendid opening for so young a man as myself; and a very great compliment, too, that Wilkins and Slack should have given me the preference over all the men they know who are practising up in London."

"I see."

Conrad frowned.

"Really, Griselda, you don't seem very sympathetic! I thought you would be delighted; but instead of that, you display an indifference which surprises me!"

"Oh, no, no, dearest! I am not a bit indifferent. How could I be indifferent to anything that concerns you, when you are the only person I care about in the whole world?"

Conrad was easily appeased. Men with dull perceptions usually are.

"Well, Griselda, this does concern me most intimately. It is the chance for which I have been waiting ever since I was born—the chance of planting my foot upon the lowest rung of the ladder of success."

"It is splendid, darling! and so nice and kind of Wilkins and Slack to remember you!"

"Oh, I don't think much of their kindness!" replied Conrad with a laugh; "it strikes me that they wouldn't have remembered me if it hadn't suited their book to do so. They've hit upon me because they think I'm the best man they can get for the job; you can set your mind at rest upon that point."

"I am sure you are, dearest."

"And you can set your mind at rest upon another thing," Conrad continued: "which is, that I'll see their confidence in me is not misplaced."

"But, Conrad, dear," and that truant colour of Griselda's vanished unnoticed again, "you surely don't mean to say that you will go?"

Conrad looked at her in amazement.

"Not go? Not accept such a splendid offer as this—

the chance of a lifetime? Why, Griselda, you must be mad to ask such a question !”

“But, you see, Conrad, I can’t—can’t go with you!” suggested Griselda timidly.

“No, by the way, I suppose you can’t. I had forgotten that. But you’ll be all right at home, Griselda ; and you can have your mother and your aunts to look after you as much as you like.”

Griselda’s lip trembled, but she tried to be brave.

“Oh, yes, darling ! of course I shall be all right ; and, as you say, mother and my aunts will be at hand whenever I am dull or out of spirits.”

“But you mustn’t be dull or out of spirits, my dear child ; you must cheer up and have a bit of pluck, or else you’ll make yourself ill—and there’s nothing I should dislike so much as to come home and find an invalid wife awaiting me. A sickly wife is the sort of thing no man can be expected to stand ; and especially a man who has his way to make in the world, as I have.”

Griselda laid her hand upon her husband’s shoulder.

“You needn’t be afraid, dear ; I’ll take every care of myself, you may be sure, for your sake ; for I know how much you dislike delicate people. And the time will soon pass in looking forward to your return.”

“Of course it will, Griselda. Now you are taking a sensible view of the matter, as I expected you would. You are the right sort of wife for an ambitious man. You will never drive your husband mad with absurd whims and fancies, as so many women do, and utterly spoil his career.”

“I will try not, darling.”

“And you will succeed. As I have told you before, I could not have done with an exacting wife. An exacting wife would take more time from the pursuit of fame and fortune than I have to spare.”

“Oh, yes, dear ! I quite understand that.”

"And, after all, the woman is repaid in the end ; for it is her right to share the fame and fortune which she helped her husband to attain."

"Of course it is ; and she is amply compensated for anything which she may have given up when she sees her husband at the top of the tree. In fact she would be amply compensated by his success even if she did not share it at all. It would be enough for her, if she really loved him, just to see him succeed. I can understand Josephine's rejoicing in Napoleon's triumphs, even after he had put her out of his life altogether."

Conrad shook his head.

"No, no, Griselda ! I do not agree with you there ; I do not think a man has any right to exact sacrifices from a woman, and not repay her for them afterwards. I quite think with you that Napoleon behaved like a soldier and a statesman in putting his wife second to his ambition in the earlier stages of his career ; but when he forsook her in the days of his glory, and consigned to sorrow and obscurity the woman who had climbed life's ladder at his side, I think he behaved abominably, and deserved all the subsequent misfortune which befell him !"

Griselda looked at her husband with worship in her eyes.

"How good you are, dear love !"

"No, Griselda ; I am merely just. As I have told you, ambition is the ruling passion of my life, and therefore I could not allow anybody—not even my own wife—to stand between me and its fulfilment. But, on the other hand, since you are willing to share the struggle, I fully acknowledge your right to share the triumph when it comes."

"Dear Conrad !"

"Understand me, ambition is the only rival that you will ever have : no other woman henceforth shall have part or lot in my affections or even in my friendship. You are now so absolutely the one woman in the world to me that it bores me inexpressibly even to speak to any other : since

I married you, all other women, as far as I am concerned, have ceased to exist."

"As long as you love me better than any other woman in the world, I am content."

"I not only love you better than any other woman in the world; you are the only being in the world, man or woman, for whom I feel an atom of real affection. In a way I respect and admire my father; but there is, and could be, no question of love between him and me. I may not be an affectionate man by nature—I believe I am not; but every particle of affection in my composition is completely absorbed by you, Griselda: you may stake your life upon that."

"You make me so happy, dear, when you say things like this. I don't believe there is another woman in the world who is so happy as I am—and it is all your doing."

"And I always shall make you happy, my dear child," replied Conrad, "if you will take me as I am, and not expect impossibilities of me. I told you when we were engaged, as I tell you now, that love of power is my master-passion, and that no woman was justified in marrying me who was not content to stand second to that. But, given that, she shall know no other rival; and whatever power I win shall be equally shared by her."

Griselda held up her head proudly. "Surely that ought to be enough for the most exacting of wives!"

"It ought to be, my dear, but it isn't; wives are uncertain kittle-cattle. Half the women in the world marry a man because they have made up their minds that he is the very opposite of all that he really is or says that he is. When they are married they naturally find out the truth; and then they spend the rest of their lives in punishing him for not being what he never tried nor even pretended nor even wished to be. Consequently half the marriages in the world are unhappy ones."

"Well, ours isn't, anyway. I think it would be impossible to find any two people who suit each other better than we do, Conrad."

"So do I. And you must always remember, Griselda, that though, like Wolsey, I may be unsatisfied in getting, half of what I have, always is, and always will be, yours by inalienable right. I have a sovereign contempt for men—of which, alas! there are far too many—who climb the hill with a woman by their side, and then are ashamed of her when they get to the top, and leave her at home when they go out to dinner. You need never be afraid of my leaving you like that."

"Not even when you are Lord Chancellor or Prime Minister?" asked Griselda, with a happy laugh.

"Not even when I am Lord Chancellor or Prime Minister. But you will have to pay the price of a distinguished husband by not demanding too much of him in his undistinguished days. You can't have anything without paying for it—always remember that: in this world nobody can have anything for nothing; and people who think they can, only win for themselves mortification and disappointment."

"But, darling, I thought that the best things in life were given to us out-and-out, and hadn't to be paid for at all?"

"So the religious world would tell you; but it is mistaken. And many besides religious persons make the same mistake; they have what they like, and then when the bill comes in, as it always will come in sooner or later, they cut up rough and make a fuss about it."

Griselda drank in her husband's words of wisdom.

"Then you think that the sensible man is he who knows what he wants and is willing to pay for it?"

"Of course he is; and he'll have to pay the full price, too. He need have no doubts on that score. But yet, if he's got what he wants, he has no right to complain."

"Oh, Conrad, how wise you are, and what a lot you know!" murmured Griselda.

"And I'll tell you another very common mistake which people make," her husband continued, "also assisted by the religious world: they imagine that evil things must be paid for, but that good things will be given them gratis, if only they have the wisdom to turn from the evil and choose the good; and, as a matter of fact, one set of things is as expensive as the other."

"But still, dear, don't you think that people ought to be rewarded for self-denial and for choosing things they don't like instead of things they do? Like Solomon asking for wisdom instead of for anything nice, don't you know, and then having all the nice things as well?"

The Gaukrodger tradition as to the pleasure derived by their Heavenly Father from the sight of His children's sufferings and discomforts, had not even yet been expunged from Griselda's mind.

Her husband smiled.

"You remind me of a story I once heard of a little boy who was asked by his parents on his birthday what he would like for a present; and he replied that he thought he should like a hymn-book, but he knew he should like a squirt. Whereupon his parents at once presented him with a squirt as a reward for demanding the hymn-book."

"And you think the parents were wrong?"

"They were distinctly enervating, and untrue to life. We have all got to make up our minds whether we want squirts or hymn-books; and we mustn't be disappointed afterwards if we find our squirts too wet or our hymn-books too dry. And, above all, we mustn't expect to get the squirts thrown in as a reward for selecting the hymn-books; because they won't be."

"Well, I think they ought," argued Griselda.

"Then I don't. It would be against every law of economy, either political or otherwise; and, moreover, so

unjust. I have no patience with your religious people who apparently always flatter their God into giving them what they want, by pretending they want something else which He thinks they ought to want. Why can't they make up their minds to serve either God or Mammon, and then stick to their choice through thick and thin?"

"I suppose their duty pulls one way and their inclination another."

"Bother their inclination! I have no patience with such shilly-shallying. Why can't they serve either one master or the other? I'm not much of 'a glutton in piety,' as an old woman once said of herself, nor much of a Bible-reader either; but I've a certain respect for old Elijah on the top of Carmel, when he said, 'If the Lord be God, follow Him; but if Baal, then follow him'; but for goodness' sake make up your minds one way or the other, and stick to it. He never suggested that if only they decided to serve the Lord, they should get Baal thrown in as a sop; he was too much of a man and too much of a statesman for that."

"The real point is, of course, that people's wills and wishes ought to go together," sagely remarked Griselda.

"Of course they ought; you've hit the nail on the head. I tell you candidly that I've made up my mind to serve Baal, and to choose a squirt instead of a hymn-book. I mean to go in for the whole thing, and not try to get a bit of the other side as well; and I'm convinced that if only the Lord-worshippers would give to their cause the whole-hearted concentration that the Baal-worshippers give to theirs, infidels such as myself would have considerably more respect for the other side than we have at present."

"But, Conrad dear, I think you are a little unjust towards religious people. Take father, for instance: no one could have a more dreadful religion than his; but such as it is he sticks to it, and gives up everything for it."

"But he hates it all the time, and only sticks to it

because he is afraid of doing anything else. Why, Griselda, you must have seen for yourself how he is always trying to propitiate his God by making himself uncomfortable. No, mark my words, when a man once throws himself wholly on the side of religion, and cares for it so absorbingly that Mammon has actually no place in his life or thoughts or wishes, that man carries all before him, and always will."

"But I thought you didn't agree with religious people," remarked Griselda.

"No more I do. I think the man who gives up all for religion is simply supporting a lost cause and sacrificing himself for a mere chimaera; but all the same, I think he has secured a fulcrum for a lever with which he will succeed in moving the world. Look at Elijah and Mahomet and Wesley—I should call them alike deluded fanatics; yet the fact remains that they all three wrote indelible words on the records of their day and generation. I hold that the single-mindedness of their championship obviated the weakness of the causes which they championed."

Whenever her husband talked in this way, Griselda's interest was intense. As a rule he was a cold and somewhat silent man, not giving utterance to the thoughts of his heart; but on the few occasions when he did break forth into speech, and conversed openly of the matters nearest and dearest to him, he was undeniably worth listening to. And no one knew this better than his adoring, yet withal appreciative, wife.

"If," he went on, "a man sets one thing and one thing only before him, and never turns away from that one thing either to the right hand or to the left, that man is bound to accomplish his end; it is the many-sided men of divers interests that fail, and the men of one idea that succeed. For instance, Griselda, I hold that if a statesman were to arise nowadays who would worship the God of the Christians utterly and entirely, with not the faintest thought

of either self or Mammon, that man for a time would convert the world. Not that I think such a thing desirable, mark you ; from my point of view it would be quite the reverse, and I trust that such a man never will arise. But if ever he does, the world will worship him, as it is always ready to worship anybody who wholly despises it—though alas ! such despisers are strangely few and far between : and it will follow him, as it is always willing to follow any man who cares for something more than he cares for himself.”

“Then you believe that the secret of success lies in singleness of aim ?”

“I am convinced that it does.”

“Darling,” whispered Griselda, looking up at her husband with awe in her beautiful eyes, “I believe that you love power better than anything ?”

“Yes, Griselda, I do ; better than I love life, or you, or even myself. To me, power is the one thing worth attaining ; and for its own sake—not for mine ; for I am prepared to sacrifice myself to any extent in the attainment of it, and to suffer any personal loss or inconvenience or sorrow if only in the end place and power shall be gained.”

Griselda shivered a little. She admired this imperious husband of hers more than ever ; and there was doubtless much in him to command admiration. There is much in Milton’s Satan to command admiration likewise ; but the normal woman would hardly select Milton’s Satan as a soothing and comfortable companion for domestic life ; at least, if she did, she would probably find existence a little fatiguing at times.

But Griselda Clayton had succeeded in getting her heart’s desire ; and consequently, as her husband had pointed out to her, she had no right to grumble when she was called upon to pay the price. We all, if we are so fortunate as to get our hearts’ desires, have to do that ; and most of us will admit that as a rule the price is not exorbitant—the article is generally well worth the cost.

Anyway Griselda found it so, and did not complain, although her heart sank a little as the preparations for Conrad's voyage to India were being made. But she bravely hid her fears and regrets from her husband, and bade him goodbye with a smiling face ; and if her smiles gave place to passionate weeping after he had actually started and she was left alone, it was no business of anyone save Griselda.

Although she missed Conrad with an absorbing intensity which a more complex woman would fail to understand, she nobly fulfilled her promise not to injure her health or her beauty by fretting and chafing. The patience which was an inherent part of her character stood her in good stead now, as it had in the days of Conrad's life in London ; and she succeeded in possessing her soul not only in patience but also in peace.

During her husband's absence Griselda saw a great deal of the Stillingfleets. She and Lois frequently met in the meadows lying between their two houses ; and John felt his instinct of compassion—always so strong in that race of public benefactors and heroes whom men call doctors—strangely stirred by this beautiful and uncomplaining woman, who had been forsaken for a time with such consummate coolness by the husband whom she adored.

Griselda thought about Conrad constantly ; her passionate longing to see his face and hear his voice and touch his hand grew stronger and more consuming day by day. But she never questioned, even in her own heart, the righteousness of his decision to accept the Indian brief. She was one of the women who love so devoutly that they positively welcome suffering on behalf of the being whom they worship ; therefore the more agonizingly did Griselda yearn for Conrad, the more did she rejoice that she was thus allowed to endure sorrow for his sake. She clasped to her heart the very thorns that pierced her, because they had originally been planted there by his dear hand.

She had a small carriage of her own with a pair of white ponies (Conrad had never denied her any luxury), and she used to take Lois for long drives, unattended by any servant, through all the pleasant Mercian land. Sometimes they would drive to Northbridge, that grand old town set so proudly on a hill commanding the River Sabrina, that travellers say it reminds them of Jerusalem; and sometimes they would go still farther beside the river to the quaint little village of Quetford, where the houses are not built at all, but are carved out of the face of the soft red rock. But their favourite drive was up the steep Holloway, and by the green lanes and the old coach-road to Baxendale Hall.

One never-to-be-forgotten morning in February—one of the days when the bare branches are beginning to blush a faint pink at the thought of the kiss of spring which is awaiting them just round the corner of the year—Griselda and Lois went for their favourite drive through Baxendale Park. They were slowly ambling home again along the lanes, drinking in with every breath the delights of the soft air laden with the scent of the damp earth, when suddenly a gipsy-boy sprang over the hedge, and, laying his hand on the ponies' reins, brought the carriage to a sudden standstill. He was a handsome lad, somewhere between fifteen and twenty years of age; but his face was already brutalized and his features coarsened by evil habits and unholy thoughts.

"What do you want?" asked Griselda somewhat impatiently, trying vainly to soothe the restive little animals.

"Money," answered the lad insolently; "and money I'll have!"

"But I have no money with me," replied Griselda; while Lois, whom the shock had sorely frightened, sat pale and trembling.

"You lie!" replied the gipsy with a foul oath. "Give

me money at once, I say, or I'll drive your carriage straight to hell!"

"I repeat that I have no money with me," said Griselda with great firmness. "How can I give you what I have not got?"

The frightened ponies were rapidly getting the better of their struggle with her; and not a single farm-labourer was to be seen in any of the adjoining fields who would come to the rescue.

Again the boy poured forth a stream of vile language.

"I swear I will have money from you now, or my name's not Zadkiel Lee!"

Griselda lifted up her head in scorn. Who was this low gipsy-boy that he should intimidate her?

"For the third time I tell you that I have no money to give you. Get out of my way at once!"

The boy did get out of her way, and in so doing gave one of the ponies a cut with a willow-wand which happened to be in his hand. This was the last straw. The terrified little creatures completely broke loose from Griselda's control, and dashed off at a mad gallop, swaying the carriage violently from side to side. Along the lanes they went as if on the wings of the wind; and then across the high ridge of Teteleigh Wood and straight down the steep Holloway. On they flew at a terrific speed, the two women clinging to each other inside the carriage—Griselda in her terror calling upon her husband to save her, and Lois crying to her God. Then, at the foot of the hill, came a final crash; and carriage and ponies and women were rolled up together in ghastly and wild confusion.

CHAPTER XI

ENTER ARCHIBALD

They knew not whence the tyrant came ;
They did not even know his name ;
Yet he compelled them one and all
To bow in bondage to his thrall ;
And from their lips allegiance wrung,
Although a stranger to their tongue.

—*Verses Wise and Otherwise.*

CONRAD was proceeding successfully with his case before the courts of Calcutta, and was beginning to look forward to his return home, when he received the following letter from Miss Jemima Gaukrodger :

“ MY BELOVED AND ESTEEMED NEPHEW (for surely, since man and wife are one, and you are Griselda’s wedded husband, I may be permitted thus to address you),—It is with heartfelt joy and thanksgiving that I take up my pen to write to you, and to communicate to you a piece of news which cannot fail to be even a greater source of rejoicing to yourself than it is to us, who are united to our dear Griselda merely by the tie of kinship, and not by the still closer and more intimate one of wedlock. About a week ago our beloved Griselda became the mother of a most beautiful boy—a child who already reproduces the great physical and mental gifts of both his parents in a marked degree. It would be beside the mark to ask you—a father—to excuse the partiality of me—a mere great-aunt, but with all due

allowance for the natural partiality of kinship, I can assure you that this infant is already distinguished by a fascination of manner quite equal to his remarkable perfection of health and beauty. Both he and his mother are progressing in a manner calculated to afford unbounded satisfaction to all those among whom they are deservedly dear; and I cannot conclude this most satisfactory account of the perfect well-being of both mother and child, without testifying to the unfailing skill, kindness, and vigilance of Dr. Stillingfleet, to whom—under God—I think we owe the preservation and safety of Griselda and her child.

“But, alas! the joy which Dr. Stillingfleet has ensured—under God—for others, has not been allotted to him in a like case. About a fortnight ago our dear Griselda went out driving in the pony-carriage, as was her wont, accompanied by her beloved friend and companion, Lois Stillingfleet. At the top of the Crompton Holloway—that hill always fraught with danger to the unwary traveller—the ponies ran away, being frightened by the unwarrantable insolence of a mendicant gipsy-boy, Zadkiel Lee by name, who, I have since learned, is a terror in all these parts, on account of his violent language and evil ways, being strangely conversant, for a lad of his tender years, with all manner of sinful and unholy living.

“At the foot of the Holloway the carriage overturned, Griselda and Lois being still inside. Neighbours speedily flew to the rescue; and the two dear victims were conveyed to Dr. Stillingfleet’s house, which was close at hand, and where, as a matter of fact, Griselda is still lying, as the doctor has not yet thought it desirable to convey her to her own home, although he hopes to do so in the course of another week.

“There Griselda’s baby was born, three days after the catastrophe; and I rejoice to inform you that, owing to Dr. Stillingfleet’s incessant and unremitting care, neither she nor the infant is any the worse for the imminent peril

which threatened to destroy them both. But, alas and alas ! not so with poor Lois. She was carried home in an unconscious condition, in which she still remains, although her little son was born the very afternoon of the accident ; and he—poor, unoffending lamb—has suffered indeed, while Griselda's beautiful babe has escaped. Lois's baby is a most wretched specimen of suffering humanity—pallid, wizened, and deformed—his little limbs being all shrunken and twisted, and his wee face lined as with the sorrows of the ages. Dr. Stillingfleet fears that even if the frail life is, in God's good mercy, spared, the child will be always more or less of a cripple ; and if it pleases the Lord to take Lois, her husband prays that the child may be taken too, as its life can never be anything save a burden to itself and to all around it. But Dr. Stillingfleet adds that for the mother's sake no effort must be spared to prolong the life of the child—at any rate until she has recovered (if ever it pleases God that she should recover) from the terrible shock which has thus prostrated her. Should she awaken to consciousness only to discover that the babe, for whose advent she had so longed and prayed, is already dead, nothing, the doctor says, could save her ; but if only the undesirable little existence is spared until the poor mother has once more regained her hold upon life, she may yet live to rejoice the heart of her husband again as she has rejoiced it hitherto ; and may still bear wholesome and healthy children to rise up in the future and call her blessed, and to take the place of her afflicted firstborn, when the Lord shall see fit to recall the unfortunate sufferer to Himself.

“ But to return, dear nephew, to more cheerful subjects. Griselda informs me that your son is to be named Archibald, in accordance with your wishes ; and I am bound to admit that it is a cognomen of most distinguished and agreeable sound. She herself—and this is a source of much sorrow of heart to me and my two sisters—is indifferent as to the form whereby the sweet infant should be received into

the Church of Christ. Consequently my sisters and I felt it laid upon us to take charge of the dear child's immortal soul ; and we agreed with Dr. Stillingfleet that it would be well for both infants to be baptized at once.

"So his son was baptized by the name of Mark, and yours by the name of Archibald, a well-sounding appellation, as I have said ; although for my part I should have preferred a scriptural name, considering such as more seemly for the inhabitants of a Christian land. But Griselda was as firm in her choice of Archibald as Dr. Stillingfleet was decided in his selection of Mark—the favourite name of his still unconscious wife. May it please God that this unconscious wife may yet be spared to Dr. Stillingfleet !—for a more devout Christian and a more devoted husband I never saw. Perchance his love for his wife is so great as to partake of the nature of idolatry, in which case his God may see fit to remove the desire of his eyes at a stroke ; and if so, may the Lord Himself heal the wound which He, in His Almighty Wisdom, pleases to inflict, for I believe it would verily be the death of John Stillingfleet if Lois were to die ! And may God keep us all from setting our affections so securely upon things of earth, that human love can ever come between ourselves and our Maker !

"And now, my dear nephew, permit me to say farewell. Griselda, who is aware of my intention to write to you, sends you her 'devoted love' (that is her exact expression), and bids me tell you that she and her boy are strong and well enough to please even you.

"And now, believe me to remain

"Yours in all sincerity and Christian fellowship,

"JEMIMA GAUKRODGER."

As Conrad read this letter he felt his heart thrill with pride. How splendid to have a son of his own, to inherit all that he meant to make in the way of fame and fortune, and to carry on, in his name, whatever work he chose to

begin ! He was delighted that the baby was a boy. He disliked girls. And how characteristic of Griselda to come unharmed through that horrible accident, and to let neither herself nor her child be the worse for it ! Somehow Griselda always seemed to do the right thing. And how characteristic of Lois also, he thought with a scornful laugh, to allow herself and her baby to derive the maximum of misery from the affair ! Lois was always unlucky : it was her nature to be so ; and there is something very irritating about unlucky people. He hated them.

How tiresome of Zadkiel Lee, the dishonest gipsy-boy, to have done so much mischief—and how fortunate that he had not done more ! Conrad wished that he could have condemned the boy to lifelong transportation for that affair of the hare ; it would have saved this catastrophe, anyway.

The thought of Zadkiel reminded him of the itinerant preacher ; and he recalled how the old man had talked a lot of balderdash about how Conrad's firstborn should not inherit Conrad's title and estates. What rubbish it all was ! And what a fool the man was to believe that some supernatural Power would vent upon an infant, only just now born, indignation at an act of bare justice performed by the infant's father some eight or ten years ago !

And as Conrad thought upon these things he smiled.

CHAPTER XII

CONRAD COMES BACK AGAIN

Obedience to his behest
Disturbed their sleep, destroyed their rest ;
But when his drowsy eyes grew dim,
No mortal dared to waken him.
They stole about with stealthy tread :
“ The baby is asleep,” they said.

—*Verses Wise and Otherwise.*

THE months rolled on, and in their progress, contrary to everybody's expectations, succeeded in restoring Lois Stillingfleet to health. Likewise contrary to expectation, little Mark did not die either, but developed in a way which at the time of his birth had seemed utterly impossible. Owing to Dr. Stillingfleet's unwearying care and skill, the tiny limbs gradually straightened themselves, and the small face lost its expression of care and emaciation. The baby was still delicate—probably would always be more or less so as long as he lived; but he was not crippled or deformed, as was feared at his birth—and, after the first three or four months of his existence had passed, there was nothing repulsive about his appearance, as there had been at the beginning. True, he made a sorry contrast to the magnificent Archibald, who was exceptionally big and strong and handsome. But Stephen Ireby said that Mark was no more delicate as a baby than Lois had been at the same age ; and although she had never become a strong woman in the same sense as Griselda was strong,

she was quite vigorous enough for the everyday needs of this working-day world. And John foretold that little Mark would be the same, after he had outgrown, as he now promised to do, the serious effects of the carriage accident which befell his mother just before his birth.

Griselda loved her baby after a fashion, and was intensely proud of his strength and beauty. But her passion for Conrad was too absorbing to allow the parental, any more than the filial, part of her nature full play. She loved her husband so intensely that there was actually no room in her heart for any other strong affection. Because Archibald was Conrad's child, and because Conrad had always desired a son to come after him, Griselda would have gladly laid down her life to save the boy's; but she did not adore her baby for its own sake, as so many women do. In her nature the instinct of the wife would always be paramount over that of the mother: she was made so, and could not have helped it if she would.

But with Lois it was altogether different. Although an excellent and most dutiful wife, she had never loved her husband as he had loved her. He had shared with her father the niche in her heart which, until his advent, that father had occupied alone.

In every woman's heart there are secret places which one key, and one alone, can unlock; and that key may lie in the hand of father, mother, sister, brother, husband, or child. Different keys are placed in different keeping; and some few are clasped in the Hand of God Himself, among which may be counted such instances as that of Mary of Bethany, S. Catherine of Siena, and S. Elisabeth of Hungary, with Anne Askew, Madame Guyon, Sister Dora, and others in later times: women who, according to their several days and generations, were tortured, not expecting deliverance; and whose lives, superior to earthly claims, were hid with Christ in God. Yet even

these, having obtained a good report through faith, received not the promise ; God having provided some better thing, in which His more human children shall also share, that they without us should not be made perfect.

Lois Stillingfleet was one of the women whom nothing but motherhood can awaken to full understanding—in whose hearts none but baby-fingers can unseal the well-springs of life. It was not until after her baby was born, that her character blossomed and budded and bore its choicest fruit.

The soul of every woman is holden by the frosts of early spring until such time as her Beloved shall come down into his garden to eat the pleasant fruits which are his by right, be he friend or lover, husband or son. Then at his touch the spices flow out—the camphire, the spikenard, the frankincense and myrrh ; the winter of her spirit's immaturity is over and gone, and all the flowers of her nature spring forth into life. For her the time of the singing of birds is come, and the voice of the turtle is heard in the land.

Then let each woman look well to the garden of her soul ! Let her, to whom spring has already come, carefully cultivate her gifts and her graces, until they flourish as vines and bud forth as pomegranates—taking heed meanwhile to those little foxes which in time, if unchecked, will spoil the tender grapes ! For the garden which is neglected, speedily becomes a wilderness ; and the orchard, which is neither pruned nor cultivated, a waste and desert place. And let her, with whom it is still winter, use that winter as a time of preparation, so that spring, when it cometh, shall bring forth myrrh and aloes rather than thorns and thistles ! For whatsoever a woman soweth, that shall she also reap.

There are certain women, poor souls !—known surely to all of us—who are hard and bitter and dissatisfied and unloving, because winter is still beside them, and spring

tarries long upon the way. "It is because winter is here that we are this and that," they say. "Only let spring come to us, and we shall be as happy and bright and loving as the rest." Foolish and perverse generation, not to know that even the seed sown in weeping must be precious seed, or else there can assuredly be no joy in harvest; and that no spring that ever yet gladdened the earth has been known to bring forth grapes of thorns, nor enabled men to gather figs from thistles!

"Isn't it wonderful to be a mother?" Lois said to Griselda one day. "I feel somehow as if I had never lived until my baby was born."

"I think it is more wonderful to be a wife. I never lived until Conrad kissed me."

"Well, I didn't feel that about John. I love him very much, and always shall, but not as I love my baby. Mark seems to have called into being a new part of me which never existed before. I feel as if I can now understand and enter into things of which I was incapable of having the faintest perception before baby came."

Griselda looked thoughtful.

"I know what you mean. But it was Conrad who made me feel like that—not Archibald."

"Dear little Archibald, what a splendid boy he is! I only wish my little lamb were one quarter as well and strong!" And Lois sighed.

"But your baby is much better than he was," Griselda hastened to assure her, snatching little Mark out of his cradle in an unwonted burst of tenderness and pity, and covering his tiny form with kisses. "Your husband was saying to me only yesterday that he believes Mark will grow quite strong and well in time."

"Yes, he feels quite sure he will; and what a joy that will be!"

"I wonder if you will love him then more than you do now," said Griselda.

Lois laughed outright.

"Of course not! What a dreadfully ignorant goose you are, Griselda! Why, the fact that my baby was sickly and ugly and almost deformed, only made me love him the more: I so wanted to make up to him, poor darling! for all that I thought he was going to miss in life. You'd have felt just the same yourself if Archibald had been delicate."

"No, I shouldn't," replied Griselda slowly, putting Mark back into his cot. "I'm sure I shouldn't. I should have been ashamed of him for not being what Conrad would like. Conrad detests weakness of any kind, you know, and admires nothing but strength and power. He despises people that are weak, either physically or mentally. And Conrad has so dominated and pervaded my every thought and feeling, that I have ceased to have any ideas or opinions apart from him."

"Do you mean that he insists on your always agreeing with him?"

"Oh dear no, not at all! It is my own doing, not his. It isn't that I *won't* think for myself: I *can't* think for myself. Conrad has such a strong personality that, unconsciously to himself, he has completely merged my individuality in his."

So the weeks slipped on until Conrad had won his case, and it was time for his return to England—that return for which his wife had never for an instant ceased to yearn since he went away. But when at last he did come, and she actually saw his face and heard his voice again—hardly believing that it really could be he, the bliss of being with him seeming to be almost too intense for mere flesh and blood to bear—Griselda was very calm, very composed. She was far too happy to say even to him how happy she was.

And her cup, indeed, seemed overflowing when she took him upstairs, and they stood by Archibald's cot, and gazed

at the handsome rosy boy who belonged to them both, and had been sent to draw them still closer together.

"He is splendid!" cried Conrad,— "simply splendid! I never saw such a fine little chap for his age in all my life before. By Jove, what a man we'll make of him, Griselda!"

Then Conrad woke the sleeping child, and took him in his arms, and dandled him upon his knees, and generally gloried in him; and so great was Griselda's love for her husband that there was no tinge of jealousy in her perception of the fact that Conrad was more delighted to see Archibald than he was to see her. If only Conrad were happy, she was content.

"He is very like you, Griselda," continued the delighted father, as the baby clapped his hands and crowed for joy at this unexpected excitement which had broken the monotony of his sleeping-hours. "He has your fair hair and lovely complexion and straight profile."

Griselda smiled in utter contentment.

"I had rather he had been like you, dear."

"Well, then, I wouldn't. You're a sight better-looking than I am, Griselda, though I know I'm not a bad-looking chap as men go. But you are a regular beauty; and the boy has shown most commendable foresight in deciding to take after his mother."

"Still, I'd rather he'd been like you," persisted obstinate Griselda.

"I hear that the Stillingfleets' baby is a dreadful little object?" continued Conrad, as Archibald sat smiling upon his father's knee, sampling, in the light of an edible, the paternal thumb.

"He was frightful at first—quite deformed and disfigured. But now he's so much better that he's really presentable: an ugly baby, but nothing actually repulsive about him."

"Horrid little thing! I hate ugly children. How

exactly like Lois to have a disagreeable and repellent infant ! She always does the unattractive thing when she can. It's her way, I suppose."

Griselda shuddered. Suppose Archibald had been like Mark ; how could she have borne it ? Yet the accident might have affected both babies alike.

"You always were hard on Lois, dear," she pleaded ; "and it wasn't her fault that poor little Mark was born deformed."

"I never could endure her ; she is such a pensive, drooping, sickly little thing. How Stillingfleet could marry such a creature beats me ; and now his son is as ugly as the mother."

Griselda shuddered again as she kissed her husband's forehead.

"Dear old Conrad, how delightful it is to have you back again ! But see, darling, baby is dropping off to sleep. I think we'd better put him back in his cot."

So Archibald was restored to his little bed, to complete undisturbed his night's rest ; and as Conrad stood looking down upon the drowsy boy, a great wave of emotion swept over him—a flood of such strong feeling as he had never experienced in all his life before. His love for his wife was sincere, though somewhat cold and unsympathetic ; but for this tiny creature—bone of his bone and flesh of his flesh—he felt a passionate tenderness such as Griselda had never succeeded in awakening in him. This little creature was a potential man—no weak and ineffectual woman ; a man who could one day stand in Conrad's shoes and complete whatsoever work he might choose to begin ; a man who would carry on his name and line, so that he would not, even when he died, be forgotten and blotted out of remembrance.

And then, as once before, this train of thought brought back to his mind the incident of the gipsy-boy and the wandering preacher, and the maledictions which the strange

old prophet had uttered regarding that firstborn son which had only now been given to Conrad—all these years after Philemon Gleave had foretold such grim things concerning him. There was no denying the fact (though it could only be a strange coincidence) that some power had seemed to struggle with Conrad for possession of the boy even before his birth ; for it was almost by a miracle that the child had ever seen the light at all. It was of course, Conrad told himself, absurd even to remember the ravings of a wandering lunatic, not responsible for the nonsense he talked ; but nevertheless it seemed as if there were something, after all, in the old man's words, and as if some Supernatural Force was marshalled against the boy even from the beginning—a Force Which Conrad had ventured to defy, and Which apparently had taken up the challenge thrown down by him in the insolence of his youth.

And as Conrad thought upon these things he trembled.

BOOK II

THE STRUGGLE

CHAPTER I

CASTLE CARNOCH

"We met (like others) in a crowd ;"
A very unromantic meeting !
Yet Fate to us has ne'er allowed
A warmer greeting.

—*Verses Grave and Gay.*

"It's a remarkable thing, when you come to think of it, Sophy," said Eileen St. Just, rocking herself to and fro in her hammock, and gazing up through the flickering leaves at the blue sky, "that it should have been left to you to invent Man and Manners and Marriage, and everything that begins with an M."

Young Mrs. Bamfield settled herself in her comfortable garden-chair. She would not have lolled in a hammock on any account as Eileen was doing ; she considered it unladylike.

"I don't know what you mean," she replied placidly. "I didn't invent Marriage ; other people have been married before I was—hundreds of them."

"Miss St. Just means that although undoubtedly Man and Marriage did theoretically exist before your time as public institutions, no other woman ever knew anything at all about them from an experimental point of view," explained the third member of the trio—a fair, delicate-looking man of about three-and-twenty, stretched at full length upon the grass.

"But other women have been married before," repeated

Sophy, into whose head an idea never entered without much knocking and ceremony of entrance.

"They have," agreed the man solemnly; "I have even come across such cases myself."

"But not to Gregory Bamfield," murmured Miss St. Just.

"Of course not, Eileen dear; but they might have been. Gregory might have been a widower when I married him."

"Would have been," added the young man, "if he'd only had a previous wife. Nothing in that case could have prevented it save a special Act of Parliament."

Sophy did not in the least know what the other two were talking about. She was aware that they were making fun of her; but what did that matter? She had been accustomed ever since her babyhood to be made fun of by her brother Archie and his bosom friend and comrade, Mark Stillingfleet; and she had grown accustomed to it—even to like it. To tell the truth, it had now and then occurred to her since her marriage that it would be a nice change if her husband made fun of her sometimes instead of always finding fault. But these were not right thoughts. She did not encourage them; she considered them unwomanly.

"Then if other women have been married before, I obviously didn't invent Marriage," she said with triumph.

"Oh, yes, you did!" retorted Eileen. "As Solomon once remarked, there is nothing absolutely new under the sun. But an inventor is a person who takes the old things that have been there always, and finds out that they are in reality new things that never have been there before; and that's why inventors are such tremendously smart people."

"Precisely," echoed Mark Stillingfleet, with becoming gravity. "I never heard the *rôle* of an inventor more graphically or more accurately described. For instance, ever since the days of the immortal Polly, men have been putting the kettle on; but it was reserved for James Watt to discover its particular object in boiling over. By many men, beginning with the attractive Paris, has the apple been

awarded ; but it was the sole prerogative of the excellent Newton to find that in figures rather than in faces lay its speciality."

"Thus you see, Sophy, that you are the female Isaac Newton and James What's-his-name, who has, for all practical purposes, invented Marriage and Man. Nobody ever knew anything about either of them until you went into the business, and so nobody except you is capable of teaching other people anything about them ; you must see that for yourself. So we really are within the mark when we state boldly that you invented them both."

And Eileen threw a look at Stillingfleet through the meshes of her hammock which in a less aristocratic young woman would have been a wink.

"Or rather, to speak more correctly," added Mark, "you invented Marriage and discovered Man."

Sophy smiled placidly. Mark and Eileen were being very clever, she supposed ; they evidently thought so themselves, but she was no judge. After all, she felt it was better to be pretty than witty, and better to be married than either. Young Mrs. Bamfield was quite content, and absolutely conventional.

"Yes," Eileen agreed, "Mr. Stillingfleet is right: Gregory was a discovery rather than an invention. We do not wish to be too hard upon you, dear Sophy."

"I really think it would be most correct to describe him as an embodied argument."

"I know Gregory is fond of arguing," said the unruffled Sophy ; "but he really doesn't mean it—it is only his way."

Mark half raised himself from the grass and shook his head reproachfully at Mrs. Bamfield.

"A wife should never try to explain away her husband ; she should merely accept him, as we accept old age and Sunday and the income tax, as things to be endured rather than murmured against."

"Oh, I wasn't murmuring or complaining or anything of

that kind!" Sophy hastened to assure him. "I only said that Gregory was rather fond of arguing."

"Which statement far be it from me to dispute!" said Mark, sinking back into his former position.

"I don't quite understand now what is the difference between an invention and a discovery," remarked Sophy after a moment's pause.

She always strove to improve an occasion and to cultivate her mind when possible; she considered it intelligent to do so.

Stillingfleet slowly lighted a cigarette.

"An inventor, my dear Sophy, is a person who finds out that a thing which has always been there has never really been there at all, but has been something else quite different; while a discoverer is one who finds out that what has never been there until this minute has really been there all the time. The distinction, I admit, is subtle; but a mind such as yours will have no difficulty in grasping it."

"It's a pity when a man gets into the habit of always finding fault with his food; it irritates the cook, and they are so difficult to get nowadays," said Sophy. Then with apparent irrelevance she added: "I wonder whether baby will take after Gregory when he grows up?"

Mark looked grave.

"When the nurse gave him his bottle this morning, I noticed an inclination on his part to say that it wasn't Gunter's."

The only daughter of the House of St. Just giggled loudly in her hammock; but the young mother calmly replied:

"Oh, Mark, what nonsense! Baby isn't old enough to know anything about Gunter; and besides, I don't buy his food from there—I always get it at the grocer's."

"By the way, Mr. Stillingfleet," asked Eileen, again peeping through the meshes of the hammock at the recumbent

figure upon the grass, "would you rather invent or discover a wife?"

"I don't very well see how he could discover a wife," Sophy interrupted, "unless she was a South Sea sort of person, who lived on an island dressed in beads. Men don't discover wives—they get introduced to them, given of course that they're in Society, which nobody who isn't ought to marry at all. And, besides, how could you? It would be so horrid afterwards with all your wife's common relations turning up."

Mrs. Gregory Bamfield's conversation was apt now and then to appear disjointed to the casual listener; but to those conversant with the workings of her well-regulated little mind, the connection between her various trains of thought was obvious.

Mark disregarded her interruption altogether. Sophy was so good-tempered that people did not mind how rude they were to her; that sort of nice rudeness, of course, which is meted out only to very amiable people, and which is a far greater compliment than the stilted politeness used as current coin in our dealings with the cantankerous and ill-natured.

Let all those who find themselves invariably treated with studied courtesy and consideration, beware! For this enforced ceremony is very frequently only dislike in disguise.

"When I go in for a Mrs. Mark Stillingfleet," the young man replied, thinking to himself meanwhile that the meshes of a hammock made a very effective frame for blue eyes, "I shall first discover, and then transplant, and then cultivate, and finally delight in her—after the manner of Sir Walter Raleigh and the tobacco plant."

"And finally trample upon her, after the manner of Sir Walter Raleigh and the cloak!" added Eileen with a laugh.

"Possibly; if I find she is one of those rich and rare spices from which the full flavour is extracted only by

bruising. I shall spare no pains, either to herself or me, in extracting the fullest amount of enjoyment out of her; I can promise you that."

"But Sir Walter Raleigh didn't trample upon his cloak," interrupted Sophy; "he only let Queen Elizabeth do so, if you remember."

"Then that was much worse. It is far worse of a man to let another woman trample upon his wife than to do his own trampling himself; don't you think so, Mr. Stillingfleet?"

"I have known it done; but I admit that it is not a mode of procedure which particularly commends itself to me."

"But you see it was the queen and not another woman who trampled upon Sir Walter's cloak," suggested Sophy.

"Should you let even the queen trample upon your wife?" persisted Eileen, with a very mischievous look.

"I couldn't very well, because she would be the queen herself, you see; I shouldn't marry her unless she were."

Miss St. Just nodded.

"Of course. And when you advertize in the papers for a Mrs. Mark Stillingfleet, I suppose you always add, 'Nobody but queens need apply'?"

"That is my invariable rule."

Sophy's pretty face wore its usual puzzled expression.

"But there are so few queens in the world," she argued.

"There are: but one would be sufficient for my purpose."

"I suppose," Sophy continued, "you mean that if you were in love with a woman she would seem like a queen to you. You don't mean that you would only marry the sort of woman that the rest of the world thought was a queen—a real queen, I mean?"

"I should never know what the rest of the world did think about her, because I should consider her too sacred to be discussed by the rest of the world; and if the rest of the world ever took the liberty of attempting to discuss her with me, I should quietly show the rest of the world

the door. Therefore, to the day of my death I should never know whether the rest of the world regarded her as a queen or not, and I should care still less."

"If she really was a queen," remarked Eileen, "she'd have to choose you instead of your choosing her. Queens always do."

"Indeed, Miss St. Just; I doubt it!"

"Yes, they do. And she'd make her own terms, too. Queens always do."

"Not when they make terms with me."

"And I think—in fact, I am almost sure—that she'd have to make the offer herself," continued Eileen.

Mark laughed softly.

"Not she! Why, that would spoil half the fun."

"Well, it's the correct thing," persisted Miss St. Just: "queens always make offers instead of receiving them. When a queen wants to propose to a man she says, 'May I offer you half-a-crown?' That's the way it is done."

"And I don't know that it's such a bad way, after all. If a queen said that to me, I should reply, 'By all means, madam, if you'll accept a sovereign in exchange.'"

"That would be making a very good joke," admitted Eileen.

"And making my own terms as well, which she would have to keep to, or her name wouldn't be Mrs. Mark Stillingfleet."

"I wonder what her Christian name would be?" remarked Miss St. Just demurely.

Mark's eye twinkled.

"So do I. To tell you the truth, that's a matter I've speculated about two or three times myself."

"I think we ought to be going in," said Sophy, rising from her chair. "It is time for Gregory and Archie to be back from fishing. It's tiresome for men if they haven't had good sport, and so it's no use irritating them still further by not having the tea ready the moment they

come in. And when I'm here, mother always expects me to pour out, just as I did before I was married."

So the three friends left the leafy glade by the side of the loch, where they had been spending the afternoon, and strolled slowly to the castle, which stood half-way up the hill.

It was a beautiful afternoon in the middle of August. The gardens, which sloped down from Castle Carnoch to the water's edge, were ablaze with flowers; and the purple flush of the heather had not yet faded from off the mountains, which stood round about. The loch—in reality only an arm of the northern sea, which had stolen lovingly round a range of fir-clad hills—shone as a sea of glass, and the valleys stood so thick with corn that they seemed verily to laugh and sing. It was a beautiful place, this old Scotch castle, which Sir Conrad Clayton, the Home Secretary, had just purchased; and he and his family were thoroughly enjoying it now that the session was over and the autumn vacation had begun.

Sir Conrad's family-party consisted of himself, his wife, his son Archibald, and Sophy his married daughter. Sophy and her husband were now staying at the castle, as also were Mark Stillingfleet, Archie's great friend, and Eileen St. Just, the only child of a distinguished Irish peer.

Of the trio who were wending their way from the woods by the side of the loch up to the castle, there was no doubt that Sophy Bamfield was by far the best-looking. She was a wonderfully pretty little thing, barely twenty years of age, with that fluffy golden hair and dazzling complexion which are never found in perfection outside the British Isles. It was this exceptional prettiness which had secured for her, when she was just eighteen, the hand of Gregory Bamfield, the representative of one of the oldest and dullest families in the whole county of York. As for intellect, she possessed none, any more than did her brother Archibald, three years her senior.

But as they were both exceptionally good-looking, this lack in nowise troubled them. They were content to have inherited their mother's beauty instead of their father's brains.

In the matter of mere beauty, then, Miss St. Just was undeniably her friend's inferior. Although the daughter of an acknowledged early-Victorian belle—Kathleen Kirkpatrick by name—Eileen was not strictly beautiful. Unlike the Claytons, she had inherited her father's head instead of her mother's face. True, she had her mother's lovely Irish eyes, dark hair, and wonderful charm of manner; and there was an air of such radiant health and strength about her, that wherever she had been, in her twenty years, she had carried all before her. But a classical beauty she was not—which perhaps made her all the more dangerous, as men fell into her toils unwarned. She was not so obviously pretty as to suggest to them that they had better set a watch upon their hearts before exposing those organs to her influence; and consequently their hearts passed out of their keeping before they knew where they were. And it must be admitted that when once Miss St. Just had got hold of a heart, she was not very conscientious about returning it to its original and rightful owner—as, of course, she ought to have been, when she found she had no particular use for the thing herself. But she kept it as a mere plaything as long as she could; even when she knew that some other woman, if she would only give that other woman the chance, would guard and cherish it as a most priceless treasure: which really was not commendable behaviour on the part of the only child and heiress of Ralph, Lord St. Just. It was a source of great annoyance to her mother that Eileen was the only child. Her ladyship would dearly have loved to have a son to succeed to his father's title and estates; as it was, the title would die out, and the estates would belong to Eileen's

husband, whoever he might happen to be ; and as Lady St. Just characteristically remarked, "It is poor fun taking everything from your son in order to give it to your son-in-law ; and the fact that you've never had a son, doesn't make it any the pleasanter !"

When Mark Stillingfleet rose from his reclining posture on the grass and accompanied the two girls to the house, it was observable that he halted a little upon one foot. It could hardly be called a limp, it was so slight ; and it had its origin in the fact that one of his legs was the faintest shade shorter than the other. A casual passer-by would hardly have noticed it at all, and to no one was it ever very perceptible ; but Mark was cruelly sensitive upon the point—far more so than he need have been—and he frequently disquieted himself, and quite in vain, as to what people were thinking about this slight imperfection of his ; while really they were not thinking about it at all. If anyone else had cared so deeply about so small a matter, Mark would have been the first to reassure them with his gentle raillery ; but then it is so easy to perceive other people's little absurdities, and and so difficult to discover our own !

We most of us know what qualities in ourselves our friends and acquaintances approvingly commend ; and we all of us are aware of those which they more or less sorrowfully condemn ; but as to those peculiarities of ours at which our world good-naturedly laughs, we have no more idea, nor ever shall have, than the proverbially ignorant man in the moon.

Yet we feel sure that we must appear ridiculous sometimes, because everybody does, and we are not one whit better nor one whit worse than our fellows—for the which we ought to give thanks, since happiness is never to be found save in the normal and the commonplace ! This sounds at first a hard saying, when we remember the number of people, particularly very young people of the

fairer sex, who imagine that no one else ever thought or felt or suffered as they think and suffer and feel. Thus happiness is not for them, they cry; and they experience distinct delight in the lamentation. But, oh dear! yes it is, and plenty of it—and of the most normal and commonplace variety, too. For, though they would not now forgive us for even hinting at such a thing, the day will come when they will thank God that they are as other men, and, most especially, as other women; and will not only recognize, but rejoice in their unfitness for anything save the common lot.

The common lot is the best thing that this life has to offer; and, luckily for us, the best of us are fit for nothing better—since there is nothing better this side heaven.

CHAPTER II

A RETROSPECT

He did well according to his lights, and hoarded many a shekel,
And prepared a sumptuous epitaph to grace his future tomb :
But the angels crossed it out and wrote above it, "Mene tekel,"
And then bade him learn his lesson in the very lowest room.

—*Love's Argument.*

THE years had indeed dealt kindly with Conrad Clayton since the day when he returned from India to find Archibald awaiting him. His life had been one long success. His efficient conduct of the case in India first brought his name before the legal world, and it was not long before his name was seen in every trial of importance. He soon left Silverhampton for London, where he speedily climbed to the top of the tree. From thence he went into Parliament—politics rather than law having always been his passion—and so distinguished himself in opposition that his leader, on the return of his party to power, gave him office. Here, also, he showed himself so wise and so capable that he gradually made his way into the Cabinet, and was rewarded by a baronetcy on the occasion of his party's defeat. Then came another spell of opposition, which opportunity Sir Conrad was not slow to turn to account ; and to such good account did he turn it, that on the return of the Liberal party to power he was offered, and accepted, the post of Secretary of State for the Home Department in the Duke of Mershire's Cabinet. He had been Home Secretary for just three months when he

bought Castle Carnoch, and the large estate on which it stood.

To the outward eye Conrad Clayton was an ideally fortunate man—the very archetype and embodiment of worldly success. Apparently he possessed everything that the heart of the most ambitious man could desire : high rank, official place, and political power ; great wealth, for he had amassed a large fortune during his career at the Bar, in addition to that which he had inherited from his father ; and idyllic domestic happiness, with a devoted wife and children all alike celebrated for their unusual personal beauty. What more could anyone ask at the hands of a kindly and indulgent Fate ?

Yet there was one bitter drop in Sir Conrad's overflowing cup, one contaminating fly in his pot of precious ointment ; and it seemed rather an absurd sort of fly, too. The world, even if it had known of it, would only have laughed it to scorn, and said that no one who had experienced much real trouble could make a trouble of such a thing as this. Conrad himself, being above all things a man of the world, saw the absurdity of this thing as clearly as anybody, and despised himself for the hold which it had taken upon his otherwise so well-regulated mind ; but all his self-scorn did not serve in any way to loosen that hold.

The thing which lay like a black shadow right across the pathway of the distinguished statesman was nothing more nor less than the malediction of the long-dead preacher. It was strange—or, rather, it was not strange at all—that a man who had trampled faith underfoot, should fall a victim to superstition ; human beings are so constituted that they must believe in something, and if they reject the truth they may rest assured that something else will take its place. There is no such phenomenon in the world as a real unbeliever ; there are only variations in the divers things which men and women believe.

As is so often the case with persons who labour under a foregone conclusion, coincidence lent its aid to establish this conclusion more firmly. The accident to Griselda just before Archibald's birth had seemed to support the theory that some Supernatural Power, defied by Conrad, was struggling with him for possession of the boy; and this theory gathered additional force from the fact that Archie was one of those high-spirited, fearless children, who are always exposing themselves to danger in one way or another. By the time that he was twenty he had had the majority of his limbs broken and successfully mended again; and every fresh accident as it befell him was an added turn of the dagger already plunged up to its hilt in his father's soul. Moreover, be it coincidence or what we will, the former part of Philemon Gleave's prophecy had undeniably come true: Conrad had indeed attained fame and fortune, as the old man had foretold, and a title withal to hand down to his eldest son. What if the rest of the prophetic utterance should come true also, and Conrad's firstborn should neither inherit his possessions nor be called by his name? If so, he felt, his life was no pleasure to him. Where was the use of heaping up riches, if Archibald might not gather them? What was the good of making a great name, if his son should go down before him into the grave, and that name should therefore perish among men?

Conrad had never told his wife a word about the old man's prophecy, which had left a permanent ache in his paternal heart: he felt it would be too cruel to ask her to share a misery, which, although the world would have called it imaginary, was real and bitter enough to him. At any rate she should be spared a dread which took nearly all the sweetness out of life as far as he was concerned.

If he had had other sons, he felt it might have been different; but only one child was born to him after his return from India, and that was a girl. Conrad was very

fond of Sophy, but she was never as dear to him as was the son whom he adored ; and her marriage lessened her hold upon his affections, as Gregory Bamfield was the type of man he especially disliked. Conrad echoed Lady St. Just's sentiment that it is hard for a son-in-law to supplant a son ; but he spoke with more authority on the subject than did her ladyship, he having enjoyed an experimental knowledge of both the articles in question, while she spoke in supreme ignorance of either.

There was no doubt that Gregory was an excellent match for the pretty Miss Clayton ; and, knowing this, her father wisely gave his consent to the engagement at once. Conrad was essentially a just man, and he realized that a parent's whims and fancies and personal preferences are negligible quantities in the sum of argument which should decide a child's choice of a husband or wife. Had he known anything against Gregory's character he would have brought all his influence and authority to bear in preventing Sophy from accepting the man. But he did not : nobody did. If there were a faultless and fault-finding prig upon this earth, that prig was embodied in the mortal clay of Gregory Bamfield. He was the sort of person who would have given music-lessons to Beethoven and painting-lessons to Michael Angelo with equal readiness and confidence ; and would have felt all the time how very fortunate these masters were in having secured him as a tutor.

Therefore it was gall and wormwood to Conrad Clayton to realize that, if anything happened to Archie, the whole of his large fortune and estates would go to Gregory. There was no alternative ; and to picture the self-sufficient Bamfield ruling at Castle Carnoch in his stead, improving his arrangements and correcting his mistakes, was more than the Home Secretary could bear. Gregory was a strong Conservative—not from any conviction, but merely because his father-in-law happened to hold office in the Liberal

Government ; and he never lost an opportunity of publicly supporting the Conservative cause in and out of season. Had Sir Conrad been a good old Tory, Mr. Bamfield would have erred on the side of Socialism. He was one of those conscientious people who never let any mere personal opinion stand in the way of their making themselves disagreeable ; and such men are not ideal sons-in-law for the fathers of the State. Both in public life and in the House of Commons there was no politician more just to his opponents than Sir Conrad Clayton. He was renowned for his fairness in debate, and his ability to see clearly the two sides of any question put before him ; but he found it difficult to keep his usually equable temper when his son-in-law saw fit to point out to him the crass ignorance and stupidity of the party which was not so fortunate as to count Mr. Bamfield among its supporters.

As for Lady Clayton, she was but little altered from the Griselda of old. She was somewhat stouter, perhaps, than in the Silverhampton days, and her hair had lost the bright golden sheen which is the prerogative of fair-haired youth ; but it was as abundant as ever, with scarcely a streak of grey, and on the whole Griselda was quite as lovely as a matron as she had been as a girl. She was absolutely happy ; her utter self-abnegation had been more amply rewarded than she could ever have hoped for, and her husband's distinguished career had been the complete fulfilment of her heart's desire.

Archibald was still at Oxford, where he had done nothing and never would do anything. He had wished very much to go into the army ; but Sir Conrad had put his foot down once for all upon this idea. The reason he gave to the boy was that he could not spare his only son to take up any profession, for Archie was destined for political life and was expected to become his father's private secretary as soon as his Oxford career was ended. But the real reason—known only to Sir Conrad himself—was that he

literally dared not expose Archie to the dangers of a soldier's life. He was afraid to add the perils of war to those terrible odds already on the side of the Unknown Power Which was fighting with him, as he believed, for the possession of his well-beloved son.

Tertius Clayton had died long ago, and so had Mr. and Mrs. Gaukrodger and the three aunts. Josiah only survived Griselda's marriage for a couple of years, and then expired—without even seeing the face of his favourite child again—of a broken heart, which he himself had ground to powder on a nether-millstone of his own manufacture. His wife, however, lived to see her three children happily married, and to watch their children in turn growing up around them; and no one derived more satisfaction from Conrad's successes than did his meek-spirited mother-in-law.

John Stillingfleet also was dead; but not so Stephen Ireby. Stephen, having retired from business, had made his dwelling with the Stillingfleets. John worked himself into his grave while Mark was still a schoolboy; and now Mark and Lois and Stephen Ireby lived on at the little red house, near Silverhampton.

Lois was very little altered by the flight of time. She was one of the women who look old when they are young, and young when they are older; so the years had improved rather than detracted from her appearance. And she was unaltered, too, in her absorbing and passionate love for Mark. He was still all-in-all to her, as he had been when he was a baby; and there never was a shadow of difference or even of reserve between these two—each could read and did read the other like a book.

And truly Mark was a son of whom any mother might be proud. Although he was still physically weak, and always would be, with his slight and somewhat short figure and his almost imperceptible limp, he was in intellect a very giant among men. At school and at Oxford—

to both of which he had gone on scholarships—he had carried all before him; and he was now waiting to take his First in Greats, as he had already done in Moderations. He was strangely lovable, too, with his whimsical humour hiding a nature of almost womanly tenderness and sympathy. He was sensitive to a fault, especially on the subject of his lameness; but of self-consciousness he had none—nor of shyness either—though to everyone save Lois he was deeply reserved as to the things about which he really cared.

He was by nature religious; and this natural tendency was greatly strengthened by his upbringing and environment. His early training had made spiritual things seem very near to him and very real. Stephen Ireby and his daughter had their conversation in heaven rather than on earth; and Mark had always lived with them. Then he fell under the spell of Oxford—that Oxford over which the spirit of the great Tractarian Movement still brooded—and he learned how the inward and spiritual grace in a man may be implanted and cultivated by the sacrament of the outward and visible sign; and how again, in turn, the outward and visible sign may become the testimony to and the expression of the inward and spiritual grace; until by the signs and symbols which they have seen, men learn to know the Father Whom they have not seen, that God may be all in all.

CHAPTER III

ON THE LOCH

I will strew my best till death
On her path across life's valley;
She—my Queen Elizabeth,
I—her faithful Walter Raleigh.

—*Verses Grave and Gay.*

IT was on a glorious August morning that Mark and Archie went fishing in a fresh-water loch on the Carnoch estate about seven miles from the castle. This loch lay among the foundations of the hills, far away from the dwellings or the haunts of men. It was surrounded by range behind range of mountains; no trees nor shrubs were in sight—nothing but turf and heather and browsing sheep. Upon the tops of the mountains the sunlight often played, but never upon the face of the water; that was veiled by the eternal shadows.

Before lunch Archie was so intent upon the sport that he had no time for the discussion of (to him) less important matters; but in the contentment which followed the consumption of a packet of well-assorted sandwiches, the heir of the house of Clayton discoursed upon wider themes.

Mark knew what was coming; he had known it all the morning, for a long and exhaustive experience of the ways of Archibald had taught him that when that young man was not thinking and talking about sport, he was thinking and talking about love—or, rather, about the somewhat

shallow and transient emotion which went by that name in Archie Clayton's vocabulary. Mark himself attached quite a different meaning to the word. As a rule he endured with outward calm and inward amusement the recital of Archie's many plunges in and out of the river of romance; but this time he felt the story would be less entertaining and considerably more irritating than it had ever been before, and consequently he postponed the hearing of it as long as he conveniently could.

But this was not for long. Like his sister, Archibald usually said what he intended to say, regardless—because ignorant—of other people's wishes in the matter. So immediately after lunch, when his appetite for food and for sport had been alike allayed, the young man began:

"I say, old fellow, doesn't it strike ~~you~~ that Eileen St. Just is an uncommonly smart sort of girl?"

Mark had been right; the subject was as lacking in humour and as irritating in tenor as he had expected. Nevertheless, he replied, with a fair show of amiability:

"She is undeniably clever."

"And not bad-looking?"

"Distinctly the reverse."

"Do you know, old man," said Archie confidentially, "that I'm tremendously sweet on Eileen—regularly bowled over in fact?"

Mark knocked the ashes out of his pipe.

"Shows your good taste," he remarked quietly; "it's not always so unimpeachable."

Archie laughed; any reference to his numerous affairs of the heart afforded him unqualified satisfaction.

"And she's a nice girl, too; a regular out-and-out good sort, don't you know?"

"Not a doubt of that," agreed Mark, drawing out his tobacco-pouch.

"Of course you've only just met her; but Sophy and

I have seen a lot of her the last three years. She isn't pretty enough to knock a man over at first sight, I admit; her nose isn't up to that job, though her eyes and teeth are all right. But she's an awfully nice girl when you get to know her; I can tell you that."

Mark slowly filled the bowl of his pipe.

"She'll be an adorable woman when she gets to know herself; I can tell you that."

"Oh, but she's a deal cleverer than you think! There's isn't much that you could teach Miss Eileen."

Mark deliberately struck a match.

"Still I fancy there are one or two things that I should like to teach her, if only I had the chance."

"You're wrong this time, Mark; quite out of it. I've known her pretty well for the last three years, and I've come to the conclusion that there isn't much I could teach her."

Mark applied the match to the bowl.

"I daresay not."

"Oh! of course, you're a good bit cleverer than I am; I admit that," cried Archie generously. "See how you romp through all your schools, while I don't even get a look in!"

"You flatter me. Still it was not exactly that kind of information which I was yearning to impart to Miss St. Just."

"Well, whatever it was doesn't matter much, for I mean business this time, and intend to settle down into the regular old Benedick-the-married-man sort of business," said Archie, waxing more confidential. "'The governor's awfully keen on it, for Eileen isn't a bad thing for a man, taking her all round. She'll have a pot of money when old St. Just kicks."

Mark's pipe was troublesome; it required the whole of his attention just then.

"She's rather a cool sort of customer," Archie went

on,—“that’s the worst of her. There’s nothing warm and cosy and affectionate about those deuced clever girls!”

“Isn’t there?”

“No! and a man’s an ass who supposes there is. You’ve just got to take women for what they are, and not ask ’em to do what they haven’t got in ’em to do. For instance, a man’s a fool who expects a clever girl to be fond of spooning, and all that sort of thing.”

“Is he? Well, *I* should.”

“Then that shows how little you know about women,” replied the past-master in the science. “The women with heads are quite a different brand from the women with hearts.”

“I’m not so sure of that.”

“Well, then, I am; and it stands to reason that I must know a lot more about the thing than you do, because I’ve had so much experience. Just look at the girls who’ve been sweet upon me: dark girls, fair girls, short girls, tall girls, thin girls, fat girls, and all sorts of girls, bless ’em!”

Stillingfleet smiled darkly.

“In most subjects experience teaches; but in a few it renders a man incapable of learning.”

“No,” mused Archie, “the fair Eileen wouldn’t be much of a hand at the love-making part of the business—I should have to make up my mind to that; but she’d be ripping good company when we were married—keep a chap alive, don’t you know? And, after all, a man can’t have everything.”

“Can’t he? Well, for my part I should expect everything.”

“Then you won’t get it, old fellow; and the sooner you leave off looking out for this rotten, fairy-princess sort of business the better. The article ain’t in stock nowadays.”

Mark was silent for a minute or two ; then he suddenly said :

"By the way, Archie, I don't think I ought to let you talk to me like this."

Archie, who by this time was lighting his pipe, looked up in amazement.

"Good heavens ! why not ? I've always told you all about my best girls ; I shouldn't feel I was really in love till I'd given away the whole show to you !"

"I know that."

"And you've always been a true friend to me ; never told me what a fool I was, but left me to find it out for myself."

Mark smiled.

"Of course I did. You were sure to find it out sooner or later ; while I might have preached till I was black in the face before you'd have believed me."

"Well, then, why should you cut up rough this time ? I'm more in earnest that I've been since Cissie Hicks, don't you know ?"

"Because——" and Mark's face flushed all over. "I daresay it seems very absurd to you, but I also care for Miss St. Just."

It took several silent seconds for this unexpected idea to penetrate Archibald's somewhat thick skull ; then he gasped :

"By Jove ! who'd ever have thought of such a thing ? This beats cock-fighting !"

"I know that it is out of the question for me to dream of winning her ; I may be a fool, but I'm not such a fool as that. But I can't help loving her, and I shall go on loving her all my life."

"Great Scott ! this is the latest—the very latest !"

Mark's face was still red with the effort of speaking ; but he bravely went on :

"Of course I mean to do great things—all men do.

I daresay I shall fail—most fellows do. All the same I shall go on striving and hoping as long as I can, that I may win something some day or other worthy to be laid at her feet. Even if I don't, I shall still have loved her."

"Well, I'm blowed!" Archie was speechless, save for sundry interjectional utterances.

"I'm hers always—even though she never knows of it. I shan't make a row when she marries another fellow. I've no right to. But I feel somehow as if I couldn't stand hearing another fellow go on about her, do you see?"

"I say," asked Archie slowly, "do you mean you want me to stand on one side while you make the running?"

"Oh, no, no! good heavens, no! In all probability I shall never be in a position to marry her, so I've no right to stand between you and her. No, Archie, I'm not such a mean skunk as that. It's all open to both of us; the only difference is that you start fair, while I am hampered by the confoundedly heavy handicap of poverty, with deformity thrown in as an extra make-weight."

"Dry up, old chap! You're not deformed; that's all rot, you know. Why, nobody nowadays would notice your little limp if you never told them of it. The governor was saying to me only the other day how much better it was."

"Well, you see," explained Mark further, "I didn't feel it was quite on the square to let you talk to me about Miss St. Just without telling you how things were with me; it seemed a bit underhand. But now that you know, it's all right."

"And you won't bear a grudge against me if I go in and win?" asked Archie, still doubtful.

"Not I! I can't promise you that I will come and

dance at your wedding; but I shall wish all happiness both for you—and her.”

“Then that’s all right.” And Archie seized his friend’s hand in a big grasp. “Your secret is safe with me, old fellow; even when I am married to her I shall never tell her that you loved her too.”

His usual whimsical smile flitted over Mark’s face.

“Oh! yes, you will; and she’ll be immensely interested. She’ll invite me to dinner at once on the strength of it, and put me to sit at her end of the table. I know her.”

“By Jove! there she is, driving the governor in the four-wheeled dogcart! They’ve come to fetch us. I’ll tell you what,” Archie continued: “you shall get out now that we are near the shore, and carry the basket of fish to the carriage; and I’ll take the boat down the loch to the boat-house, and meet you all at the other end of the lake.”

This suggestion was actuated by Archie’s usual kindness of heart. It was very cold on that loch where the sun never shone; and he had noticed for the last half-hour that Mark’s face and fingers were growing rather blue. Archie knew by long experience that a chill—which he with his splendid physique would have laughed at—was a serious matter to his delicate friend; and he therefore proposed that the latter should leave the shady surface of the water, and warm himself by a run in the sunshine on shore.

Meanwhile the subject of the young men’s conversation was chatting contentedly with her host.

“I wonder what on earth Sophy can see in that ass Bamfield?” Sir Conrad had remarked a few minutes previously, à propos of nothing save the abundance of his heart.

Eileen bubbled over with mirth.

“The reforming and missionary spirit is strong upon him to-day; he has taught me this morning how to do my hair.”

"Ah! and he has taught me how to govern the country."

"He said I ought to have it parted down the middle."

"He said I ought to take the tax off spirits and put it on to saltpetre; as if the Home Secretary drew up the Budget! I suppose he thinks he does."

"He said that hair parted down the middle was so 'womanly'; and then he added, in his most oracular manner, that in his opinion women ought to be women."

The Home Secretary chuckled.

"And what did you say?"

"I said that in our family they always were—we considered it a safe rule; but I thought some families carried it too far in insisting on all the men being old women, too!"

"Serve him right! I'm sorry to say anything against my own guest—not to mention my own son-in-law; but I can't stand that fellow at any price. He has been staying in my house now for over a month, and not a day of that time has passed that he has not put me straight on some point or another; it is more than flesh and blood can endure."

"Especially flesh and blood of Cabinet rank," added the wise Miss St. Just.

"Not that I grudge having him here, goodness knows! I am only too glad to feel that I am entertaining my daughter's husband—at least, I should be if he'd only behave himself; and the longer he stayed the better I should be pleased, if he wasn't such a confounded prig."

"I see; you don't grudge him the run of his teeth—only the run of his tongue?"

"Quite so," said Sir Conrad. "And there are the boys," he added as they drove round a corner of the mountain road, and saw the black water lying at their feet and the little boat slowly traversing it.

As the occupants of the dogcart neared the loch they

perceived Mark come ashore with the basket of fish and start to walk up the hill towards the road, while Archie turned back in the boat to make his way to the boat-house. Then, as they idly watched and waited, Archie evidently hooked a big fish with his trailing line, and leaned over the side of the little boat to haul it in. With his accustomed recklessness he leaned over too far—he was a very big and heavy man—and in a second the boat had capsized and Archie was in the water.

Eileen screamed, and Sir Conrad turned very white.

“It is all right,” he said quietly ; “Archie is a splendid swimmer.”

But all the same he sprang out of the cart and rushed down the hill, leaving Eileen alone with the horses. Mark, seeing that something was the matter, turned round, and he too ran as fast as he could to the water’s edge. Archie did not wait to put the overturned boat to rights again ; he left it where it was and started to swim to the nearest shore. For a few seconds the watchers on the bank saw him swim easily and steadily towards the land. Then suddenly he stopped and made signals of distress. To both Sir Conrad and Mark it was clear what had happened : the sudden plunge into the ice-cold water had brought on an attack of cramp.

Quick as thought Mark tore off his coat and boots and sprang into the lake ; but his lame leg always hindered him from swimming fast, and Archie was some distance from the shore. Sir Conrad—now half-way down the hill—watched him slowly making his way to where Archie was struggling in the water. The Home Secretary could plainly see the golden head of his son in contrast with the dark surface of the loch ; but, alas ! before he could reach the shore, or Mark could reach the struggling Archie, that golden head had disappeared under the black water.

And in the ears of the distracted father there rang the prophecy of Philemon Gleave :

“Thou shalt heap up riches, but thy firstborn shall never gather them; thou shalt make a great name for thyself, but thy firstborn shall not bear it after thee. And if thou shalt cry unto God for thy firstborn He shall not hearken, forasmuch as thou hast not hearkened when this woman cried for her firstborn unto thee!”

CHAPTER IV

BRIBERY

The evil that men do lives on in spite
Of all their tears ;
And floods of weeping cannot wash it white
Through countless years.

—*Love's Argument.*

As Sir Conrad would have said, fortunately, and as Mark Stillingfleet would have said, providentially, by the time that Archie rose again to the surface of the water, Mark came up to where he was, and took hold of him under the arms with such firmness that poor Archie was able once more to get his breath ; and Mark managed to keep himself and Archie above water until Sir Conrad, who likewise had plunged into the loch as soon as he could, came to their rescue. Again, fortunately, or, rather, providentially, the coldness of the water did not give cramp to the other two as it had done to the full-blooded Archibald ; and so they succeeded in bringing themselves and him safely to shore.

They could not change their wet clothes, as they had nowhere to dry them and no others to put on ; but they did the next best thing—namely, put mackintoshes over their soaking garments so as to keep all the heat inside ; and then Eileen drove them back to the castle as hard as she could.

The next morning found Sir Conrad and his son none the worse for their drenching ; but poor Mark was confined

to his room with a severe cold and a violent headache. In consequence he was extremely cross. Although he had been brave enough to save Archie's life at the possible sacrifice of his own, he was also human enough to wish to make the most of his heroism in Eileen's blue eyes; what man worthy of the name would not have felt the same in the circumstances? And yet here he was tied by the leg (or rather by the head) while Archie was making all the running. It really was trying. He longed to see Eileen's face kindle into admiration and to hear her voice soften into approval of what he had done: yet he could not so much as lift his head from its pillow; and when he whispered the beloved name above his breath, he pronounced it "Eileed."

During the morning Lady Clayton came several times to see him; she was always very kind to Mark—had been so ever since his delicate babyhood. But Mark did not want Lady Clayton just then: he wanted Eileen, and Eileen for the nonce was out of his reach. Therefore it must be admitted, though with regret, that the invalid did not comport himself as graciously towards his hostess as he might have done—as in fact he would have done had he not happened to be in love. Love may teach unfailing and unfaltering courtesy to the one; but to the many——? Well, let that man or woman who is as genial to the outside world during the halcyon days of romance as in the prosaic and prehistoric period which preceded them, sit in judgment upon Mark Stillingfleet!

But though Eileen and Archie might not be thinking much about Mark, Sir Conrad was. The Home Secretary's heart was naturally filled with an intense thankfulness towards the man who had saved the life of his beloved son; but there was another feeling underlying his gratitude—an undefined wish to make up, by means of kindness to Mark, to that Unknown Power Which apparently was still bent upon Archie's destruction.

Conrad remembered having heard as a boy that the God of the Christians regarded as done to Himself all acts of mercy shown to the widow and the fatherless; therefore might he not, so to speak, appease the Deity by showing unprecedented kindness to the widowed Lois and her fatherless boy? Sir Conrad did not now, any more than of old, believe in the God of Revelation; but the experience of life had brought him to the conclusion, as it brings most thinking men, that there exists some Supreme and Unknown Power, superior to and independent of man, Which called the world out of nothingness, and Which overrules and dominates the puppets that inhabit it.

And, further, it seemed to Conrad as if this Almighty Being had accepted the challenge hurled by himself, in his arrogant ignorance, close on thirty years ago. He had asked in his youthful pride for nothing but bare justice—the power to live his own life and shape his own ends, independent alike of Supernatural Help and Supernatural Hindrance; and his request had been granted. The Unknown God had left him alone to use his gifts howsoever it pleased him; and he had made the very most of his talents, unhampered by anything of the nature of what Christians call discipline or chastisement. But this Power had once interceded with him for the only son of the widowed gipsy-woman, and he had refused to listen to Philemon Gleave's entreaties. As he had dealt with the gipsy-boy, the old preacher had said, so the Unforeseen Force, against Which he was fighting, would deal with his own firstborn son. And it seemed as if the preacher's words were being fulfilled to the letter.

But Conrad was, before all things, a diplomatist. His guiding political principle had ever been that it is always advisable to give an inch in order to take an ell; that it is only by letting the country have its own way in small things, that the rulers of the country can get their

own way in great things ; that the only possible means of governing an empire is to make that empire believe that it is governing itself. Therefore, true to his nature though unconsciously to himself, he set about bribing the Supreme Being by uncalled-for and unexpected kindness towards Mark Stillingfleet. If only Archie was spared, Conrad was ready to deliver the poor and the fatherless, and to cause the widow's heart to sing for joy ; he was ready, in short, to expiate his cruelty to the son of the gipsy-woman by showing kindness to the son of Lois. He did not put it in so many words, but that was what he meant. He was bargaining with the Creator as he had bargained with constituencies.

On the afternoon of the day following Archie's accident, Sir Conrad went up to Mark Stillingfleet's room. Mark's head was better, so he was sitting up ; but Lady Clayton insisted on his keeping his room until his cold also was in a convalescent state.

"Don't get up, my boy," the Home Secretary began in his kindest manner, as the young man rose to greet him. "I am very sorry to find you like this, but my wife assures me you will be all right in a few days."

"I hope to goodness I shall !" grumbled the invalid.

He wondered what Eileen and Archie were doing, but was too shy to ask, though shyness was not usually a besetment of his. Had he known that they were now wandering together through the woods by the water's edge, his cold would not have felt much better.

"Words are of little avail," Sir Conrad continued as he seated himself, "after an event such as occurred yesterday ; nevertheless I must tell you, though I never can do so adequately, how overwhelmingly grateful I am to you for your splendid heroism in saving Archie's life."

"Oh, never mind about that ! I couldn't very well have done less, you know ; anybody else would have done the same."

Just now Mark was more interested in Archie on the land than in Archie in the water.

"Well, I am not a demonstrative man, as you know, and so cannot express what I feel about your deed of yesterday. But I want you to remember that you have laid me under a debt of obligation which I can never hope to repay, and that to my life's end I shall always be ready—nay, anxious—to serve you and your mother in every way in my power."

Surely this was behaving handsomely, Conrad felt; and it was not mere talk—he meant every word he said.

Mark blushed boyishly; it was somewhat overpowering to see a Home Secretary grovelling at one's feet in this wise, and especially when one was feeling *hors-de-combat* with a cold in the head.

"Oh, it's all right! I'm only so awfully glad that I was in time. I was afraid I shouldn't be, on account of this confounded leg of mine."

Sir Conrad could not bear even to think of what would have happened had Mark not been in time, so he said hastily:

"But it is on another matter that I really came to see you to-day, which I will put as briefly as I can."

Mark gave him a polite, but not an absorbed attention. What a jolly time Archie must be having with Eileen—and such glorious weather, too! It really was hard lines to be shut up indoors on such a day as this, especially when a girl like Miss St. Just was walking in the garden!

Sir Conrad continued:

"On account of my having bought a considerable amount of property in and around Merchester, the advowson of the fine old Church of S. Bernard is now mine. It is a very good living—a thousand a year with a capital rectory. The present incumbent is getting on in years, and wishes to resign as soon as I can get a suitable successor to him; but he is willing to stay on until I do.

My proposition is, that as soon as you have completed your Oxford career you should take Holy Orders. After the necessary delay of your diaconate, I will appoint you rector of Merchester. It would be an excellent settling for so young a man, and would also provide a comfortable and suitable home for your mother and grandfather, and I think that with your abilities, and notably with your gift for public speaking, you would speedily rise in the clerical profession; for the position of rector of Merchester is one of great influence and importance in the Midlands, and one which, if efficiently filled, will ensure rapid promotion."

Here Conrad the statesman patted Conrad the man on the back. This was a most politic measure; it not only propitiated Mark's God by showing kindness to Mark, but it also met Him on His Own ground, so to speak—bribed Him in the current coin of His Own realm.

Mark's attention was by this time thoroughly aroused. Sir Conrad had for the nonce succeeded in recalling his wandering thoughts from Eileen and Archie. His open eyes and mouth testified to his unfeigned astonishment; but even in his astonishment he did not forget his manners.

"It is an uncommonly generous proposal on your part, Sir Conrad," he began; "but——" and he hesitated.

"There need be no 'buts' in the matter, my dear boy. I know what you are going to say—quite proper, of course. But you will be under no obligation to me. I shall shortly have to fill up this post; and I know no one I consider so fitted for it as yourself. So you will be conferring a favour on me by accepting it."

Mark flushed with embarrassment. How could he explain his difficulty to this cynical man of the world?

"You speak most generously, Sir Conrad," he said at last, "but I have had no thought of taking Orders."

"But when such an exceptional position is offered to

you, you will surely see the propriety of qualifying for the post?"

"I am not sure."

"Well, you had better think it over," said Sir Conrad, a little nettled that Mark did not jump at the offer. "You will let me know in a day or two how you decide."

Mark felt he must seem ungracious to one who, like Sir Conrad, regarded the taking of Holy Orders in the same light as being called to the Bar—namely, as a qualification needful for obtaining more or less desirable appointments.

"Thank you, Sir Conrad; I will do as you suggest," he said; and then he added: "But I hope you will not regard my hesitation as showing any want of gratitude on my part to you——"

"There, there!" interrupted the elder man, "say no more, my boy, say no more. Think it over, and I am sure your good sense will convince you that it is your duty to your mother as well as to yourself to accept my offer."

And Sir Conrad went out of the room, leaving Mark a prey to the most conflicting emotions.

The temptation was great. Were he to accept Sir Conrad's offer, his career was assured. In a couple of years or so he would be in possession of a good income; this would enable him greatly to add to the comfort of the two dear ones in the little red house behind the poplar trees. Moreover he would be in a position of influence and power, wherein he would have immediate opportunity of using his powers—and he knew that those powers were by no means small—for good; while in the future there lay before the eye of his imagination a purple vision of ecclesiastical statesmanship and episcopal sway. But—Sir Conrad was wrong, there was a *but*, a very insistent and emphatic *but*—could he do it? Could he be certain that this was God calling, and not the voice of ambition? He had no scruples such as might have been possessed by many a clever young man. He had naturally come in contact with

the scepticism, partly real and partly affected, which so many declare to be inseparable from culture; he was not without some knowledge of the apparently conflicting claims of science and revelation. But his faith had stood the test; he was sufficiently modest to suppose that there were things in heaven and earth undreamed of in his philosophy, and sufficiently wise in some matters to suspend his judgment. Wherefore he had no intellectual difficulties to overcome. A Churchman—a High Churchman—he had in his early days imbibed a good deal of the spirit of mysticism from his own people—that spirit which sets no landmark between this world and the next, but which recognizes God's Hand in every event which befalls His children; and he had a vivid conviction of the necessity of a "call," as it is commonly expressed. Until this offer had been made to him he had entertained no idea of becoming a clergyman; his dreams had centred themselves round the Woolsack rather than the Episcopal Bench. But if he offered himself for ordination, there was a certain solemn question which the bishop would put to him. Could he honestly say, from the bottom of his heart, that it was the God of his fathers, and not the Home Secretary of England, Who had called him to this work—that it was the voice of a God and not of a man That he was obeying? Could he swear that he was inwardly moved by Power from on high to take this step, and not by the offer of a good living? No; come what might, he could not do this thing. The very fact that everything pulled in the contrary direction—his self-interest, his love for Eileen, Mrs. Stillingfleet's straitened circumstances, even his gratitude to Sir Conrad—only made him the more stubborn in his resolve. He did not come out of the struggle unscathed; he could not lightly sacrifice the prospect of easily won worldly advancement; the fight was long, the victory hardly won. Yet all through, as he debated the subject in his mind—arguing first this, then that, in favour of Sir Conrad's proposal—he

knew that the vital question of the Ordination Service must settle the matter. He was not dealing with another man ; the matter lay solely between himself and his God ; the necessity for perfect truth was imperative. Unless he could from his heart answer, " I do," the priesthood was not for him.

Having made up his mind, Mark told Sir Conrad as delicately as he could that he was unable to take Orders, and that therefore he must decline the Home Secretary's most generous offer. The elder man was not unnaturally exceedingly surprised ; he tried to combat Mark's objections, but the latter declined to discuss the reasons for his decision. Wherefore Sir Conrad told him in so many words that he was a fool ; and that, for such an impracticable fellow, success in this life was so improbable as to be to all intents and purposes an impossibility. The statesman had some ground for this opinion : his mistake lay in his assumption that there is no continuation of existence, and that death is an end instead of merely a fresh beginning.

CHAPTER V

IN THE WOODS

“Sweetheart,” he cried,
“The world is wide,
And morning has just begun :
With thee all day
I’ll work and play
From dawn till the set of sun.”

—*Verses Grave and Gay.*

WHILE Sir Conrad and Mark were holding the foregone important conversation, Archie and Eileen were carrying on a not less momentous one in the woods by the side of the firth.

After a seemly prelude of immaterial remarks in no way germane to the subject in Archie’s mind, that young man suddenly said :

“ I say, Eileen, should you have cut up rough if I’d gone to the bottom yesterday afternoon ? ”

But Miss St. Just did not happen to be in a sentimental mood.

“ I should,” she replied sweetly : “ it would quite have spoilt the rest of my visit.”

“ Oh, I say ! ” remonstrated Archie. When one has just returned from the gates of death, it is somewhat chilling to be received in this careless fashion by the girl one intends to convert into one’s wife.

“ It really would,” she persisted with increasing amiability. “ I’m not flattering you one little bit. Besides, you must

see for yourself it would have spoilt all the fun at Castle Carnoch—I shouldn't have stayed on here, it would have been so dull without you. I'd rather have gone to visit Aunt Anna Maria, father's eldest sister. And if you knew Aunt Anna Maria, you'd understand what a compliment I'm paying you."

Now Mark knew that sweetness on the part of Miss St. Just was always a danger-signal, and meant mischief; but Archie did not; therefore he rushed cheerfully in where his wiser friend would have feared to tread.

"I don't think you quite see what I'm driving at," Archie clumsily proceeded to explain. "I mean, would you have really cared if I'd been drowned, don't you know?"

"Oh, I understood you to mean that! I didn't think you were referring to my problematical feelings if you had gone down to the bottom in a diving-bell; because in that case I should have gone with you. I've always longed to go down in a diving-bell, like the man at the Polytechnic when I was a child: the only drawback is that it's such an unbecoming dress."

There was no doubt that Miss St. Just, unlike her would-be mother-in-law, belonged to the cave-woman species; she required a great deal of running after, and was extremely apt at scurrying in another direction the moment that one of her numerous admirers showed unmistakable signs of "standing no more nonsense." (That was how they usually put it.) But "nonsense" (so-called) was the thing she especially enjoyed; it might be death to them, but to her it was the most exhilarating sport imaginable.

Archibald, however, likewise belonged to the prehistoric type of lover, so he went straight and undismayed to the point. He was less cautious in his love-making than his father had been thirty years before.

"Look here," he said pleasantly, "it's no use rotting me, and pretending that you don't know that I'm dead on

getting you for my wife ; because you do ! You must have seen it coming on for months ! ”

Eileen laughed.

“ I have noticed certain suspicious symptoms, certainly. ”

“ Well, then what’s the good of coming it on like this, and pretending that you mistake me for a maiden aunt ? ”

“ Oh ! I never mistook you for a maiden aunt—really, truly, I didn’t. If I had, no power on earth would have induced me to come for a walk with you this afternoon. To tell you the truth, I’m not much of an aunt-fancier : Aunt Anna Maria cured me of that weakness quite early in life. ”

Some men would rather die than make love to a woman while she is making fun of them ; they would postpone their wooing to a more serious and convenient season. They may be wise, they may be foolish, it is impossible to say ; every man must make love according to his lights and according to his knowledge of the woman whom he loves ; and the result of his wooing lies in the lap of the gods. But Archie Clayton was not easily frightened—even by a woman’s tongue ; so he went calmly on in spite of Eileen’s gibes.

“ Well then, if you know that I am fond of you and wish to marry you, what’s the use of wasting any more words on the subject ? All I want is a straightforward answer to a straightforward question. Will you be Mrs. Archie C. ? It won’t be a bad situation, taking it all round. ”

Eileen laughed again. Archie’s bluntness amused her extremely.

“ To be equally frank with you, I already have taken it all round ; I have examined it from every possible point of view. ”

Archie looked at her admiringly.

“ Great Scott, you are a sharp one ! Do you mean to say you’ve known for long that you were going to be invited to be Mrs. C. ? ”

"For at least six months."

"By Jove, and I've only known it myself for three! Poor old Mark was out of it when he said you weren't clever!"

"What? Did Mr. Stillingfleet dare to say I wasn't clever? I never heard such impertinence!" Eileen's usually pale cheeks were quite pink.

"Oh! he didn't exactly say you weren't clever; now I come to think of it, he said you were. He only said that you weren't quite so sharp as I gave you credit for, and that it would do you all the good in the world to be taught a thing or two."

Eileen was very angry, and justly so. How dared this impudent young man throw doubts upon her undeniable wit and wisdom? It was insufferable!

"Was that all he said about me?" she demanded.

Archie thought for a moment; then he said slowly:

"All that I can remember."

He hated saying what was not true, but he felt it incumbent upon him to do so now; for had he not faithfully promised Mark not to tell Eileen that Mark loved her? According to his lights Archie always tried to do what he called "the straight thing."

"He said that I wasn't so sharp as you gave me credit for, and that it would do me good to learn a thing or two?" repeated Eileen.

"And that you weren't bad looking," added the conscientious Archie, racking his memory, and striving to be as accurate as he could without betraying Mark; "and that you'll improve as you get older and know a bit more; and that, though you set up for being so clever, you'd be just as spoony as any other girl if you'd got the chance. That was all," repeated Archie, feeling that honour compelled him to suppress the rest of the conversation, and also pleased with himself for having remembered so much that he might quote without disloyalty to his friend. And it

must be admitted that, for a repeated conversation, his *résumé* of Mark's words was unusually accurate; which proves that repeated conversations are always dangerous things.

Miss St. Just was extremely indignant, as indeed she had every right to be. She was perfectly aware that Mark admired her quite as much as Archie did,—those blue eyes of hers had been sharp enough to discover that; and she had further perceived that Mark's admiration, like Archie's, was in danger of developing into a more serious emotion. She had never met Mark until this visit at Castle Carnoch; but she had often heard about him from the Claytons, ever since she made friends with Sophy at Fox-How, a popular girls' school near London, where the two girls were educated. She and Sophy had been friends, and devoted friends, ever since their schooldays—one of those delightful schoolgirl friendships, which have so much more sisterhood about them than the friendships of later growth; and after she left school she had seen a great deal of Archie also. But this was the first occasion when she and Mark had ever met face to face; and they had made the most of the occasion.

Both mentally and physically Eileen was absolutely normal and healthy; she was neither morbid nor neurotic; she had never studied a problem nor suffered from a headache in her life. Consequently she took things as they came, wisely recognizing that her manner of taking would in no way alter their manner of coming; neither did she set herself to re-edit social rules and regulations which were formulated and published nearly half-a-dozen millenniums ago. Therefore, unlike many of her equally clever contemporaries, she had the time and the inclination to induce old-fashioned, ordinary men to fall in love with her in the old-fashioned, ordinary way.

It was therefore no slight shock to her vanity—whereof, in company with all other absolutely normal women, Miss St. Just had her full share—to discover that the latest

captive to her bow and spear spoke of her behind her back in this wise. But she quite understood Mark's attitude—or, rather, thought that she did, which comes to pretty much the same thing where a woman is concerned. He was evidently more or less in love with her; she had no misgivings on that score. Eileen was far too feminine a woman ever to doubt the testimony of her instincts, and especially on a point where feminine instinct never errs; but he was too much of a prig to acknowledge this weakness even to himself. Of course it is always upsetting to a clever man's self-love to find himself suddenly used as a little-finger-bandage by some insolent young woman, who on every point in literature or science is not nearly so well informed as he. Eileen was quite sharp enough to perceive this; and therefore, according to her interpretation, Mark concealed this weak place in his intellectual armour by speaking slightly of her to Archie: a very plausible explanation certainly of the state of affairs; only it did not happen to be the right one.

In her anger against Mr. Stillingfleet's cavalier way of treating her, Eileen felt a distinct increase of affection towards his friend. Archie at any rate was not ashamed of admiring her; on the contrary, he was anxious to advertize that admiration to the world at large in the most approved method.

"Never mind that disagreeable Mr. Stillingfleet," she said graciously; "let's return to our muttons—meaning you in your present lamb-like frame of mind."

Archie laughed that big, cheery laugh of his.

"You're right there! I'm a regular lamb just now where you are concerned: a child could play with me."

"But I thought you didn't want me to play with you any longer; that seemed to me the gist of your remarks."

"By Jove! you're too sharp for a simple Johnnie like me. You'll come a cropper one of these days if you go on being as deuced clever as all that,—no decent chap'll be

able to keep up with you." And Archie looked down from his six-foot-two to Miss St. Just's five-foot-five with an admiration which belied his words. "But, I say, let's get to the point. When shall you and I be spliced? That's about what it comes to in a nutshell, don't you know?"

"Oh dear—oh dear, how premature you are! It doesn't come to anything like that at present: you've added it up all wrong."

"Then what does it come to?" asked the good-tempered giant.

"It comes to this," replied Eileen seriously, marking off the items on her fingers: "first, I am an unusually attractive young woman; secondly, you—quite naturally, no one could blame you for your choice—want to marry me; thirdly, I'm not sure that I want to marry you. And that's what it comes to, as far as we've got!"

Archie laughed again; though he could not understand Eileen, she greatly entertained him.

"Why aren't you sure you want to marry me?"

Eileen looked him up and down.

"I'm not sure that you're a big enough man for the place," she said slowly.

"Oh, I say! Well, I'm at least nine inches taller than you, and four stone heavier."

"I don't mean big enough in actual size: how stupid you are! I agree with Dr. Watts, or somebody in that line, who remarked that 'the mind's the stature of the man.'"

"And you think I ain't a booky enough sort of Johnnie to suit you, miss?"

"I doubt it."

"Well, bookiness and all that rot isn't everything, I can tell you. Lots of clever women get on awfully well with downright stupid husbands."

"I know that; but, after all, when you're getting quite a new thing, why not get the exact thing you want? Of

course, if you're altering old things, you're obliged to do the best you can with the materials in hand ; but in buying a brand-new article you've a right to pick and choose. For instance, I can alter and adapt father and mother to fit me, though I inherited them ready-made ; but I should expect a husband to be built according to my own design, with all the latest improvements laid on."

"I should be a jolly good sort of a husband, I can tell you ! I should go my way, and I should let you go yours."

"There's nothing I should dislike more. What on earth's the good of getting married at all, paying a lot of money for the wedding and the trousseau and the cake and all that, if you're going to go your own way and I mine, which is precisely what we're doing now ? It would be perfectly absurd—just as absurd as making a great effort to go for a walk with a person, and then to insist upon walking on the other side of the road. Really, Archie, I wonder you could say anything so foolish ! I don't expect you to be booky, but I do ask you to use a little common-sense."

Poor Archie looked decidedly crestfallen ; but he made another attempt.

"I only meant that I shouldn't leave off being fond of you if you chose to go in for a lot of circulating-library sort of business which was altogether out of my line."

"Then you ought to leave off being fond of any wife who had a way of her own apart from yours. The whole point of the game lies in two people being one, don't you see ? like a prayer-book and a hymn-book bound together in one volume, and not those horrid little separate books in a silly leather case, which are always getting lost and so spoiling the other. No man—no really nice man—would want his wife to go her own way unless he'd never really loved her ; and even then he'd probably leave off."

Miss St. Just had not indulged in the luxury of an Irish mother for nothing.

"Do you mean you aren't fond enough of me to marry me?" asked Archie humbly.

Eileen's ceaseless flow of language always tended to confuse his never very rapid intelligence.

"I'm just coming to that, if you'll only give me time to speak; but you're in such a hurry I can hardly get a word in edgeways. Now I don't mind admitting to you—though Aunt Anna Maria would think it very forward of me, only she'll never know—that I have seen this thing coming on for ages, and have tried to get ready for it, for I should like to accept you, Archie, if I could—very much indeed; it would be so suitable, and would please all our people so much, and I think one ought to give pleasure to one's relations, don't you?"

Archie cheered up visibly.

"By Jove, I should just think I do! And particularly in a thing like this, which is so awfully important to everybody all round, don't you know?"

"So I have tried my hardest to fall in love with you—I really have; but somehow the thing won't come off. I'm awfully sorry, but it won't."

And Eileen looked up at him with sincere penitence in her black-fringed eyes.

Archie's face fell.

"You are beastly unkind to a fellow!" he groaned.

Eileen stamped her small foot impatiently.

"No, I'm not. How unreasonable you are! Haven't I just told you that I've been trying all I know for the last six months to fall in love with you?—and if that isn't kindness, I should like to know what is!"

"You haven't gone about the job the right way, then."

"Yes, I have. I've gone about it most scientifically; and if you weren't so silly and unreasonable you'd say so. I take one of your excellences every day and dwell upon it, just as if it were a portion of Scripture: yesterday it was your temper, and to-day it is your complexion, and

to-morrow it will be the Carnoch estate. And if that isn't doing my level best to fall in love with a man, perhaps you'll tell me what is!"

"Then do you mean to tell me you won't accept me? Is that what you're trying so neatly to wrap up?"

The mischief died out of the blue eyes.

"I'm awfully sorry to seem disobliging, Archie dear; but I can't marry anybody that I'm not in love with—it would bore me to death."

"But you like me, Eileen, don't you?"

"Yes, immensely; but I'm not a bit in love with you. I tried to pretend to myself that I was, but I knew all the time that I wasn't."

"Well, lots of people marry and live happy ever after, don't you know? without being what you'd call in love at all."

"I know that; but I think it's a silly, stupid way of doing things. It seems to me that marriage must be as great a bore to a person who isn't in love, as a musical festival is to people who aren't musical. Now just think what a musical festival would be to you, Archie: four morning and four evening performances, and only time for a snack in between!"

"Great Scott! I couldn't stand it at any price. I'm not one of your organ-grinding chaps, you know."

"Then marriage without love would be just like that to me. Now, I adore—simply adore—a festival, because I happen to be really fond of music; to me it is almost like heaven, it is such bliss. And in the same way marriage, if I was really fond of the man—why, that would be just heaven itself."

CHAPTER VI

SIGNS OF STORM

Quoth he, "Sweetheart, thou hast lands and gold,
And thou knowest not want nor woe;
As a beggar poor
I stand at thy door,
And I only can love thee so."

—*Verses Grave and Gay.*

"HERE, Roy! here, Rap!" cried Sir Conrad, throwing to his two dogs scraps of toast from the breakfast table.

"I consider it an atrocious habit to feed dogs at a meal," remarked Gregory Bamfield in a loud aside; "it spoils both the dogs and the carpet. No, go to your master," he added to the two animals, who, on hearing his voice thus raised, had vainly imagined that he was calling them. "You'll get nothing from me."

Whatever spice of the devil there was in Eileen St. Just—and there is a faint soupçon of him in a good many people—developed into a decided flavour at the touch of Mr. Bamfield.

"Oh! do you speak of Sir Conrad to the dogs as 'your master'?" she asked with an air of innocent inquiry. "I think it sounds so sweet and simple and economical, just as if you kept what advertisements call a 'general,' and were giving her your orders. To tell the truth, I never know how to speak of father to the dogs—whether to say 'Father, or 'His lordship,' or 'Lord St. Just.' You see I want to do what is right and proper, without hurting their feelings

or seeming stuck-up and snobbish, and it is so difficult to gauge a dog's exact social position."

"I think the expression 'The chief' would meet the difficulty," suggested Mark Stillingfleet solemnly, though his eye twinkled; "that would sound as if they were Civil Servants; and there is something to my mind so respectable about the Civil Service—even the name seems an earnest of good manners."

"Mark is a man of resource," said Sir Conrad with a smile.

"Talking nonsense appears to me the most utter waste of time," remarked Gregory. "I cannot conceive how people are found to do it."

"Have some bacon, dear," said his better-half, proceeding to deal out the contents of the silver dish in front of her.

Gregory glared at her.

"Do you call that stuff bacon?" he asked with scorn.

It was a superfluous inquiry: Sophy certainly had applied that term to the viand in question; whether she was justified or not in doing so was another matter.

"It isn't equal to our own bacon at home, of course, dear," she hastened to explain. "I never tasted such delicious bacon as one gets in Yorkshire."

Mrs. Bamfield was very clever at smoothing down her husband; but then it was her profession to do so. To Miss St. Just, however, it was not even a recreation, so she did not make the faintest attempt in that direction—quite the reverse.

"Anyway, it must be bacon," she remarked, "wherever it comes from. Everything is bacon nowadays—even Shakespeare himself."

In general conversation Mr. Bamfield always comported himself after the manner of a bull at a bull-fight: he kept making for picadore after picadore, for banderillero after banderillero, in a very frenzy of disseminated rage. Now

he left off goring his wife, and charged full at Eileen, who cheerfully waved her red rag aloft.

"Everyone who propounds the idiotic idea that Shakespeare and Bacon were one and the same person, is either an unreasoning dupe or else an intentional deceiver," he said in his high-pitched, querulous voice.

"I have the honour to belong to that category," replied Sir Conrad, calmly feeding the dogs.

As it happened, things were not running very smoothly at Castle Carnoch just then,—had not been running very smoothly for the last fortnight. To begin with, Archie was out of spirits. He by no means regarded Eileen's refusal as final—he fully intended to win her in the end; but a refusal which may one day blossom into an acceptance, like an electoral defeat which is in reality a moral victory, is somewhat depressing in its immediate effects. He had confided his trouble to his sister, who had been his chosen confidante from childhood; and she too came under the cloud of Archie's disappointment.

Then Sir Conrad was annoyed with Mark for not having taken in the right spirit the sceptre held out to him; and underneath the Home Secretary's irritation against what he called "an act of sentimental folly worthy of Lois herself" was a consciousness that he had failed to come to terms with the Spiritual Powers leagued against him, and that therefore the blow designed for Archie, though so often averted, must surely fall at last. And Sir Conrad's annoyance found an echo in that wifely bosom which had never failed him in any hour of need, great or small, though Griselda was ignorant of the deeper springs of action which had guided her husband in his attempt to provide for Mark Stillingfleet.

And Mark himself was not happy either. There is a current idea that when men or women give up all for the sake of conscience, they are respectively warmed and cheered by the flames of their sacrifice and the light of

their haloes ; but experience teaches that this is rarely the case. When human beings have put aside their humanity for a moment and allowed the Divinity that is inherent in every man to settle their affairs for them, the humanity which they have temporarily suppressed is apt to take it out of them sooner or later ; and in consequence there is considerable reaction, accompanied by no small amount of irritability. At least this is generally the case in modern times ; and it is doubtful if even the martyrs of old—between the turns of the thumbscrew—were really pleasant company. In this world people are never all white or all black : we are most of us merely grey, or, at best, shepherd's plaid, so that there are both black and white places in us which come to the front in turn, unless we happen to be women—in which case we are made of a shot material, and so are actually both black and white at one and the same moment.

Like most people who have been brought up in Evangelical circles, Mark Stillingfleet had not as yet comprehended the immutability of the great law of consequence. Later on he grew to understand its terrible significance : but this was taught him by the experience of life, and not by his early training.

To people who have grasped the truth that God will forgive sin, it is difficult to believe that Life and Nature will not forgive likewise. But forgiveness is not with them, and therefore they are to be feared. Repentance may avert arbitrary punishment, but it cannot remit one jot or tittle of natural consequence. That debt must be paid to the uttermost farthing. Moreover, men must be prepared to bear the consequences of their good deeds as well as of their evil ones : and in small things as well as in great. For as a man soweth so shall he also reap, even though the crop be watered by bitter tears of regret or repentance : and if a man build a tower he must pay the whole cost thereof, even though it so far exceed

his original estimate as to leave him beggared and penniless.

But poor Mark had not yet mastered this lesson of life; and in the learning of it he grew sick at heart.

Eileen's last sally would have brought a violent onslaught upon herself from the infuriated animal in the social arena, if he had not at that moment been diverted by the subject of his wife's attire.

"What in the name of goodness induced you to put that foulard on to-day, Sophy? I hate a woman to wear foulard at all, and especially in that most unbecoming colour!"

"I bought the material at a sale at Marshall's," the peacemaker hastened to explain. "I got it as a tremendous bargain; and Parsons made it up on one of Madame Zélie's patterns."

Parsons was Mrs. Bamfield's maid.

"I didn't ask you what induced you to buy it, but what induced you to wear it! I have no objection to my wife's being economical—I only draw the line at her being hideous."

"Hideousness," remarked Eileen airily, "is generally in the eye of the beholder."

"I detest women in foulards!" repeated Gregory, who, having tossed Sophy's mauve dress, now proceeded, metaphorically speaking, to gore the dark blue and white one which Eileen was wearing.

"That doesn't matter," retorted the young lady; "women don't dress to please men, but to please each other."

"Or—more correctly—to displease each other," murmured Mark.

Miss St. Just threw him a smile of appreciation across the breakfast table.

"You're not far out there," she said.

"It's a beastly sort of day for fishing," remarked Archie; "so disgustingly warm and sunny. The fish won't rise a bit. And I meant to have a day on the loch, confound it!"

"To my mind," said Mr. Bamfield, "there is nothing so unpleasant as to hear people continually finding fault ; and especially when they have no just ground of complaint, as on a sweet September morning such as this—the ideal weather for early autumn."

"I wonder," remarked Eileen thoughtfully, addressing no one in particular, but apparently communing with her own soul, "whether people are ever aware of their own weaknesses ; whether that power adjured by Robert Burns ever does permit a bird's-eye view of ourselves in the light of another's eye."

"Of course all sensible people see their own faults far better than anyone else can," replied Mr. Bamfield.

The sweet, thoughtful expression still brooded over Eileen's face.

"Oh, of course ! I can see mine quite well."

"What wonderful eyesight you must have !" exclaimed Mark.

"Not as wonderful as I could wish ; for I never am able to distinguish your virtues."

Eileen felt she owed him one for his remark about her to Archie.

But Mark "was more than usual calm."

"Don't distress yourself, Miss St. Just ; that doesn't prove any default in your eyesight. It is all my artfulness. I keep my virtues out of sight, lest others—such as yourself, for instance—should be discouraged by beholding perfections which are beyond their attainment. Moreover I have no desire to dazzle you."

"It wouldn't dazzle me to look at things that I can't see."

"Excuse me, Miss St. Just, that is the very essence of being dazzled."

Eileen did not often succeed in getting the best of Mark Stillingfleet, and she knew it.

"Well, has everybody finished ?" asked Lady Clayton,

rising from her seat behind the coffee-pot. "Because, if so, I propose an adjournment."

"How lovely it is! cried Eileen, strolling through the open front-door bareheaded into the sunshine. "Summer hasn't made up its mind to say goodbye to Castle Carnoch yet; and summer and I are in the same box, it seems to me."

Mark followed her with a sunshade he had picked up in the hall.

"Let me stand between the wind—or rather the sun—and your nobility," he said, opening it and holding it over her.

"You are very careful of my complexion," she replied with a laugh.

"I am training for public life; and it is the duty of all public bodies to see that the treasures of the nation—such as the National Gallery and Kensington Gardens, for instance—are taken care of, and kept as things of beauty and joys for ever. In me you behold a mute inglorious First Commissioner of Works."

"Then do you put my complexion on a par with the National Gallery and Kensington Gardens?"

"I think it superior to both in degree rather than in kind; all true beauty is kin, and often less than kind."

"How absurd you are!" said Eileen, smiling to herself, as they descended the grassy steps of the terrace and sat down on a seat in the old-fashioned flower-garden.

"I always try to be," rejoined Mark.

"How vile Gregory is to-day, isn't he?"

"He likewise always tries to be; and apparently succeeds in his line as well as my humble self does in mine."

"Do you think that all men get as cross as Gregory when once they are married?" asked Eileen, looking thoughtful.

"Hardly, or else surely the holy estate would become as obsolete as the burning of witches or imprisonment for debt."

"Still, Sophy did tell me, when she was engaged, that Gregory was the most angelic man she'd ever met : and she believed it at the time."

"There is no denying," said Mark, "that the experience of one's married friends points to the conclusion that Purgatory is only Paradise in excess."

There was a pause while the young man sat holding the sunshade between the westerly breeze and the girl he loved, lest the very winds of heaven should visit her face too roughly ; and at the same time envying one or two freckles which, in spite of all his care, had kissed her soft pale cheek. Then Eileen suddenly said :

"Mr. Stillingfleet, I've got something important to say to you."

"Say on, O Queen !" replied Mark coolly, wondering what on earth was coming, but carefully hiding his curiosity from the merry blue eyes.

It did not do for Eileen to know too much about what went on inside that active brain of his. A little bewilderment is extremely salutary sometimes for young women who have the ball at their feet ; it keeps them—well, perhaps hardly humble, but more inclined to humility than they would otherwise have been.

CHAPTER VII

IN THE GARDEN

'Twas not your fault, I must admit;
You simply worshipped from a distance,
And I could take no note of it
Without assistance.

—*Verses Grave and Gay.*

"I WANT to tell you," said Eileen slowly, looking full in the face of the young man seated beside her, "how tremendously I admire you for having refused Sir Conrad's offer on conscientious grounds. Perhaps you'll think me rather impertinent for saying this, and I daresay I am; but somehow I felt as if I must just mention to you how splendid I think you are."

Mark was completely taken aback. This was the last thing he would have expected to hear Miss St. Just say; for he knew that the Claytons' world was her world, and he therefore not unnaturally thought that their judgment in this matter would be her judgment likewise. He was far too just a man to have blamed her in any way, had this been the case; but he was surprised and gratified to find that it was not.

"It is very good of you to say this to me," he murmured lamely, his usual aplomb having entirely deserted him for the time.

"I felt somehow as if I ought to say it, so I made up my mind to do so, even though I am extremely angry with you about something else. I haven't a very keen

nose for duty, I admit, as Sophy has: she'd find duties in as queer places as Shakespeare found sermons; but when I do happen to see a duty staring me in the face, I generally make straight for it."

"I am very glad you have told me this," stammered Mark, "because—though I daresay you won't understand it—it isn't altogether easy for a sensitive beggar like me to—to—well, to do what he thinks is right at the cost of seeming ungrateful to his best friends."

"I think I do understand, all the same."

"I could not help taking what seemed to me the only right course in the matter. But you can't think what an ungrateful brute I've felt ever since, for throwing Sir Conrad's kindness back in his face; for he has always been a very good friend to me—even when I was a little chap in petticoats, and still more so since my father died and my mother was left a young widow in straitened circumstances."

"But when all's said and done, one's duty towards God comes before one's duty towards one's neighbour."

Again Mark was startled; he had never heard Eileen talk in this strain before. But the fact that a man feels there are surprises for him in the character of a particular woman, in no way lessens that particular woman's attraction for him.

"You can't think what a difference it has made to me your saying this!" he continued. "I suppose a man's rather an ass for wanting sympathy; but I do; and I've felt rather sick ever since I refused Sir Conrad's really generous offer, and knew that everybody was disapproving of what I'd done. I believe the fact that a man has done what he thinks right ought to be enough comfort in itself for him; but somehow it isn't enough for me."

"Poor boy! you've had rather a rough time this last fortnight."

The sympathy in the blue eyes was so unexpected and so unmistakable, that for a moment there came a suspicious dimness into the grey ones.

"It's most awfully good of you to speak to me like this, Miss St. Just; I cannot tell you how much it has helped."

"It always seems to me," said Eileen, "that most people are very fond of prescribing a disinterested devotion to duty for their friends, and very loth to apply it in their own cases."

Mark smiled faintly.

"I have known it occur; in fact I have caught myself in the very act. But one has some excuse; other people's medicines, for obvious reasons, never taste quite as nasty as one's own."

"Oh dear no! you aren't that sort; I know you better than that already. I remember once, when father was having his hair cut, the barber kept ramming down his throat (metaphorically, of course) a patent hair-wash. 'If only your lordship would use this wash, your lordship would never grow bald,' said the barber. 'Yes, I should!' replied father, 'and I'll tell you how I know. I can see that you are wearing a wig; and if the wash had been as good as you make out, you'd have used it successfully yourself, and not wanted a wig at all.'"

"Well, you can't deny that Lord St. Just's was a most logical conclusion," said Mark.

"Now it seems to me, Mr. Stillingfleet, that most people treat religion as that barber treated the hair-wash; they recommend their neighbours and friends to try it at all costs, but they themselves wear a wig."

"Perhaps they do."

"Now what I admire so much in you is that you never advertize your hair-wash at all; I never heard you utter a word in season—I don't think I ever heard you talk directly about religion: but when it comes to the point, you don't wear a wig."

"No; I do believe what I do believe—you are right there. I mayn't, as you say—and there, perhaps, I am to blame—do much in the advertizing line; but I believe that the hair-wash will—well, will wash." Mark's smile was very tender; but he had pulled himself together, and was again master of the situation. "Still," he continued, "if you won't think it rude of me (and I really don't mean to be rude), I am immensely surprised—and immensely pleased, too—to find that you understand so well what is in my mind, but what is so difficult for me to express. I didn't expect anybody to understand that, except, of course, my mother—she always understands everything, bless her!"

"Tell me about your mother, please," said Eileen gently. "I already love her for what I have heard about her from Lady Clayton. She must be one of the best women in the world."

"She is the very best, I think; and no one knows her as well as I do." And then Mark proceeded to tell Eileen all about Lois and her unfailing sweetness and her loving ways, with that look in his eyes which the mere mention of his home always brought there; while the girl listened with unspoken sympathy, wherein she showed herself wise as well as good.

There is many a woman—and not a bad woman either—who deliberately sets her influence over her husband in opposition to his mother's influence over him. The mistake she makes is twofold, and doubly certain to react upon herself. First, a time will come when the man's mother is beyond the reach of his regrets for any pain he may have given her, and then his unavailing remorse will vent itself in anger—deep, if silent—against the instigator of his rebellion. And, secondly, a good man's mother is to him the embodiment of ideal womanhood; therefore the woman who lowers his opinion of his mother, lowers his opinion of womanhood as a whole, herself included.

"By the way," Mark said in conclusion, "there is just another little matter that I want to turn to. You said, a few minutes ago, that you were 'extremely angry with me about something else'; well, will you kindly explain?"

"Oh, no, I couldn't—I really couldn't!"

"Very well."

There was silence for a second or two, and then Eileen said:

"I couldn't possibly tell you."

"Then don't; it is always wise not to do what is impossible."

"I have definitely made up my mind not to tell you this."

"All right, then let us talk about something else."

Another short silence, then—

"It was something that you said about me to Archie," remarked Miss St. Just.

"Something that I said about you to Archie? Well, I'm certain I never said anything about you to Archie that could possibly make you angry; the only objection is that it might make you vain."

"Oh, it made me dreadfully angry—frightfully angry! I don't know that I've ever been in such a temper in my life as I've been in with you for the last fortnight!"

"Good gracious! what have I been saying?"

"Oh, I wouldn't tell you that for anything!"

"All right, out with it!" Mark knew his company.

"You said," replied Eileen in an impressive voice, "that I was not bad-looking."

"Well, and you aren't, are you? If you have any misgivings on that score, pray disabuse your mind of them at once!"

Miss St. Just still looked implacable.

"It was a horrid way of putting it."

"As a matter of fact, I didn't put it; it was Archie

himself who put it, and I seconded the resolution. But I give you my word that I couldn't conscientiously have contradicted his statement, however much you may have wished me to do so. Now what was the next thing I said which offended you?"

"I shan't tell you any more."

"Very well." And Mark looked supremely indifferent.

"You said that it would do me all the good in the world to learn a thing or two," said Miss St. Just, after a pause.

"Pardon me, I said that it would do me all the good in the world to teach you a thing or two—which is quite a different matter."

"And that I should improve as I got older."

"Well, I'm sure I hope you will, and that everybody will. If we don't improve as we get older, we must be making a pretty hash of our lives. But, as a matter of fact, I didn't happen to say that. What I did say, if you will have it, was this: Archie said you were an awfully nice girl when one got to know you; and I said you'd be an adorable woman when you got to know yourself."

The offended goddess broke out into smiles.

"What an extremely nice thing to say!"

"I thought it rather neat at the time myself."

"There's still one other thing," said Eileen, "but nothing on earth would induce me to tell you that."

"Well, I really can't press the point, seeing that you have been so indulgent with regard to the others; we'll leave that, as you've been so good about the rest."

"It was this—that though I set up for being so clever, I should be just as—as—spoony as other girls if I got the chance."

Mark could not help laughing.

"That was the letter of what I said—at least, approximately so; but it was very far from the spirit of my remark. Poor Archie is not very quick at catching

hidden and subtle meanings, as I think you must have noticed."

Eileen fully agreed with him.

"None of the Claytons are very quick at understanding things, are they?—except Sir Conrad, of course," she replied."

"By no means; but there are a few things which even Sir Conrad doesn't understand."

"And precious few that the others do."

"Miss St. Just,"—suddenly all the laughter died out of Mark's face, and something else took its place—something which as yet Eileen did not understand or fathom,—“may I tell you what it was that I really said to Archie? I have no right to tell you, I know; but may I?”

According to the wisdom of this world he certainly had no right. But there is something wiser than the wisdom of this world—something which shall not be even the worse for wear, when this world has melted away for ever and been burned up with fervent heat; and this something looked out of Mark Stillingfleet's eyes as he asked the momentous question.

But before it could be answered, Sophy Bamfield's plump little figure appeared at the top of the grassy steps.

"Oh! here you are, you two; I've been looking for you everywhere. I was afraid you'd think it was rude of me not to have joined you before, but mother wanted to consult me about what alterations shall be made in the drawing-room before next year. Now I am ready to devote myself to you, and to go with you wherever you like."

Sophy always prided herself upon abundantly fulfilling her duties as a hostess.

As for the other two, they submitted to her hospitality with as good a grace as they could muster; but they felt that there is some excuse now and then for the display of ill-temper—even the ill-temper of a Gregory Bamfield.

There are few persons in this world more irritating than those really well-meaning souls who are always putting themselves out to perform officious and uncalled-for acts of kindness, which put other people out still more.

It was on that same day, but on the shady side of luncheon, that Mr. Bamfield remarked to his exemplary better-half :

"Sophia" (he always called her Sophia, because her own family called her Sophy), "has it occurred to you that a most foolish and undesirable attachment is springing up between Eileen and that wretched Stillingfleet? I know you are not usually quick to perceive anything that is not printed in capital letters under your very nose ; but this is so obvious that I should think it must be visible even to you."

"Well, Gregory dear, to tell you the truth, I have noticed that Eileen and Mark have been together a good deal lately , but I am sure that Eileen is far too sensible and well-brought-up a girl ever to think of a man who isn't well off ; and that Mark has much too great a sense of propriety to think of proposing to the daughter of a peer."

"Let us hope so ; but you never can be sure of what impertinence people may not be guilty who have the disadvantage of plebeian blood in their veins. Class will out."

"But, Gregory dear, whatever his ancestors may have been, Mark himself is a gentleman ; and father says he will make a great name, too, before he has done. Father has a very high opinion of Mark."

"Really, Sophia, when shall I make you understand the immeasurable gulf between well-born persons and those who are not well-born? Acquired rank has nothing to do with good birth. It is your difficulty in grasping this which proves your own connection with the middle-class ; you would never find my mother or sisters making such a mistake. And if you think that a really old family, such as the Bamfields or the St. Justs, for instance, would ever

consider self-made politicians on an equality with themselves, you are mistaken."

Mr. Bamfield was one of the men who imagine that to marry a woman confers upon a man the right to be rude to her. There is apparently nothing in the marriage service to justify this belief; but it is so widespread that one feels it must have some foundation, even if an erroneous one.

"Still, Gregory dear, I don't think that Eileen would ever care seriously for Mark, although it might amuse her to flirt with him. You see, Mark is very nice and good and all that, but he isn't a bit good-looking, and girls don't fall badly in love with men who aren't good-looking, any more than men fall in love with girls who aren't. And then he's not tall—only about two inches taller than Eileen herself—and of course that's much less in a man than in a woman; and he still has that slight limp, though it has almost disappeared. Oh dear, no! she's only amusing herself; you can make your mind quite easy as to that."

"I'm not so sure. Jenkinson has often seen them together, and he tells me it is the general opinion in the housekeeper's room that those two, as he puts it, will make a match of it." (Jenkinson was Mr. Bamfield's servant.)

"Well, dear," Sophy admitted, "Parsons said something of the same kind to me when she was brushing my hair last night; but I didn't take much notice of it. I don't take much notice of servants' talk as a rule."

"There you make a mistake, for no one knows what is going on in a house as well as the servants do. Jenkinson has told me many a bit of interesting gossip in his time, and I've never known him incorrect in his statements."

"Of course," said Sophy thoughtfully, "I know it is wrong of Eileen to flirt with men whom she has not the slightest intention of marrying; but it's her way—she is always at it, and has been ever since she left school. Still I should be sorry for her to trifle with Mark; he is too good

a man to be played with. I think it would be an act of true kindness to give him a word of warning, don't you, dear?"

"I think he'll burn his fingers if you don't. Those Oxford men are so conceited that they can never see when a woman is making a fool of them; they believe they are irresistible."

It is perhaps needless to add that Mr. Bamfield himself had graduated at Cambridge.

This was all that was said at the time, but it was sufficient to inspire the good-natured and conscientious Sophy with a praiseworthy intention to save Mark Stillingfleet's heart from unjustifiable treatment at the frivolous and unworthy hands of Miss St. Just.

CHAPTER VIII

INTERFERENCE

And thus we drifted far apart,
Not bound by e'en the frailest fetter;
Yet yours completely was my heart
For worse or better.

—*Verses Grave and Gay.*

THE next morning, beautiful though it was, found neither Mark nor Gregory at the breakfast table, and their non-appearance was specially aggravating to Miss St. Just—at least the former part of it was—as she and Mark had arranged to go for a day's fishing on the loch, out of reach of the interrupting Sophy. Eileen was particularly anxious to hear the correct solution of the riddle which the young man had propounded in the garden on the previous day; and all the more anxious because she knew it already.

"I wonder what has become of Mr. Stillingfleet," she remarked airily, "that I miss him in the accustomed place, like that tiresome young man in Grey's *Elegy*?"

"He is in bed with one of his bad headaches, I am sorry to say," replied Lady Clayton.

Eileen's face fell.

"Oh, what a nuisance! He was going fishing with me."

"Never mind," Archie chimed in with alacrity, "I'll go with you instead."

"It seems rather unkind, don't you think, when the plan was really his?"

"Not a bit of it. We can't stay indoors and sing hymns

by his bedside all the day ; and even if we could, it would make the poor old Johnnie's head a deuced sight worse, don't you know ? ”

Eileen did not speak. She was disappointed ; and disappointment has by no means a soothing effect upon the female temper.

“ And Gregory is not down, either,” added Lady Clayton : “ is anything the matter with him ? ”

Gregory's devoted wife spoke for him.

“ He has got a bad headache, too, poor dear ! and is staying in bed for breakfast.”

Here was an object to hand for Miss Just's ill-temper.

“ Oh ! he's only bilious. I knew he would be when I saw him eating all that lobster last night at dinner. You shouldn't let him eat such things, Sophy, when you know what a bilious creature he is.”

The adjective *bilious* is one particularly hurtful to human pride ; it roused even the long-suffering Sophy to a faint show of opposition.

“ Gregory doesn't often have a bilious attack,” she remonstrated.

“ He'd never have one at all if he'd be more careful about what he eats,” retorted Miss St. Just : “ I've no patience with men who over-eat themselves, and then expect women to play the ministering angel. You never find me with a headache ; but you soon would, if I were as greedy as a man. Men are dreadfully greedy creatures, I think.”

There was no doubt that Miss St. Just was in an extremely irritable mood ; but it was aggravating of Mark to be ill to-day, and especially as she was leaving Castle Carnoch on the morrow.

“ Gregory isn't bilious,” persisted Gregory's faithful defender. “ It's suppressed gout that makes his head so bad ; our doctor said so. And he has it in his foot sometimes as well ; he was quite lame all yesterday.”

“ Stuff and nonsense ! ” retorted Eileen. “ His lameness,

like everything else, comes from over-eating. Men must expect to be lame if they eat lobster and drink port ; my only wonder is that they can stand on their legs at all, much less walk on them."

Yes, Miss St. Just was excessively cross ; her dearest friend could not have denied so patent a fact.

She and Archie went for their day's fishing, however, and it would be difficult to say which of the two enjoyed it least.

After lunch Mark, who likewise was not enjoying himself, came downstairs, the cruel pain in his head having somewhat released its grip of him ; and, as ill-luck would have it, he found the well-meaning Sophy sitting alone upon the terrace.

"Do come and talk to me !" she cried, when she saw him ; "I've got something particular to say to you."

"All right," said Mark, sitting down beside her, and wondering what time the fishing-party would return. He also was anxious to give the answer to yesterday's riddle before Miss St. Just's departure.

"But first I do hope your head is better."

"Much better, thank you."

"So is Gregory's. He has gone out driving with mother ; he thought the fresh air would do him good."

"I trust it will," said Mark politely. "But what is it that you want to say to me?"

"Well, Mark, you see, you and I are such old friends that I could not bear any trouble to come to you which I might have prevented, and I feel I owe you something—we all owe you something—for having saved dear Archie's life that day ; and I don't feel it is right of me to see Eileen deliberately spoiling your life, without warning you that she is only amusing herself."

Mark's face changed ; the laughter died out of his eyes, and a stony, unfathomable expression took its place.

"What do you mean ? I do not quite understand."

Poor Sophy floundered a little. Mark's expression was not encouraging to confidence just now, and she was always more or less afraid of what she called "clever people." But she had set a task before herself, and she was not one to shrink from fulfilling what she considered to be her duty. In spite of her undeniable stupidity, Mrs. Gregory Bamfield was a good little woman.

"Well, it is in this way. Everybody can see that you are in love with Eileen; it is the talk of even the housekeeper's room—servants are so quick to notice little things like that. I often wonder how they do it, but nothing of that kind seems to escape them. I used not to attach much importance to servants' tales, but I'm beginning to find there's generally something in it."

"Yes, yes ! but about Miss St. Just and myself ? "

To be told that his inmost heart is laid bare upon the table of the housekeeper's room for the various ladies'-maids and gentlemen's gentlemen to peck at, is by no means pleasant hearing for a proud and sensitive man.

"Well, of course, Eileen isn't in earnest ; anybody can see that ; and, besides, she never is. And then you'd be such a miserable—— I mean, you aren't the sort of person she could possibly marry, don't you know ? And I always think it is such a mistake for a girl to waste her best years on anything that can't come to anything ; and especially a girl with dark hair, because they get old sooner than fair ones, unless the fair ones get stout, like me, which is such a pity. But, of course, being already married and settled, makes it not matter so much. And then they have to be content in the end with widowers and things of that sort ; and I don't think Eileen is a bit the sort of girl who would make a good stepmother."

"And you wish to convey to me that I am standing in Miss St. Just's light, and preventing her from doing her duty by her own undeniable charms ? Is that it ? "

Mark's voice was very quiet, but there was a ring of such

hopeless bitterness in it as would have brought tears to eyes less blind than Sophy's.

"Well, it's really more you than Eileen that I am concerned about. She's always quite clever enough to look after herself and her own interests; and, besides, there's nobody eligible up here now except Archie, and she's refused him, poor boy! But I think you are too good to be played with, Mark, I really do. And although I am very fond of Eileen and know she is great fun, I'm not so blind as to deceive myself into imagining that she's got a heart, because she hasn't."

"Miss St. Just and I are certainly very good friends; but where on earth does the playing come in?"

Mark felt he could not live without knowing exactly at what rate Eileen estimated himself and his love; and yet that it would almost kill him to be told.

"She makes such fun of you behind your back."

The young man's laugh was not altogether pleasant to hear.

"That is very witty of her! Won't you let me share the joke?—for surely a man has a right to share anything that has been made at his own expense!"

He was wondering whether Eileen laughed at his lameness.

But dull little Sophy was only delighted to find that he was taking her hint so pleasantly and regarding the matter merely from the humorous point of view; and she comforted herself with the conclusion that his affections were not engaged after all. But what a good thing that she had spoken before they were! she said to her own soul.

"Oh! I can't remember exactly; but at breakfast this morning she was making fun of your being so sickly and delicate and lame and all that, and saying she knew it chiefly came from biliousness, and that all men were greedy, and that she'd no patience with men who would eat too much, and then expect women to play the ministering angel to them."

Sophy actually believed that she was quoting her friend correctly.

Mark could not bear any more.

"Thanks, thanks, that's quite enough to prove your point—I won't trouble you to tell me the rest of Miss St. Just's wise saws and modern instances," he said, getting up from the seat where he and Sophy were sitting; "but I'm deeply obliged to you for your kindly and well-timed hint, and I'll promise you that for the future she shall not be troubled by my attentions."

But as he walked away from Sophy to the sapphire loch, he could not see the glorious panorama of wood and water and mountain spread out before him.

"I'll go home to-morrow," he said to himself, as he swallowed down a big lump in his throat. "Mother will understand; she'll never make fun of me because I am weak and poor, and such a contemptible little beggar all round. She's always the same. After all, there's nobody like a fellow's mother."

It was several seconds before the beauty of the landscape again spread itself out to Mark's view; for he was not yet four-and-twenty, and it was the first time he had ever been in love.

And thus it happened that the riddle which he had propounded to Eileen was not answered after all.

She left Castle Carnoch the following morning, much surprised that Mark Stillingfleet never even attempted to find her alone again, and utterly unable to understand his complete and unexpected change of front.

Which of us has not, at least once in our lives, experienced a similar chilling astonishment? Suddenly and without any reason as far as we can see, lover or friend is put far from us. We feel the difference, but we cannot find out the reason for it; and never shall find it out until that Day of Judgment when men and women must give account of every idle word whereby they have removed the landmarks which

guarded their neighbour's earthly paradise, and have turned a veritable garden of Eden into a waste and desert place.

Mark left the castle the day after Miss St. Just's departure, and returned to the little red house on the Crompton Road very sore in spirit. But it was not long before the spirituality of Stephen, and the sympathy of Lois made him once more take sane and healthy views of life; although neither they nor anyone else could drive the memory of Eileen out of his heart.

"Then you think I acted wisely in refusing Sir Conrad's offer, mother?" he said one day in reference to a subject which they had already threshed out. The two were sitting together in the old-fashioned garden behind the house.

"Certainly you did; I don't see how you could have taken any other course, since it was so clear to your own conscience that this was the right one."

"Still, it seemed a bit ungrateful to the old boy; and I owe him a good deal one way or another."

"But you owe God still more," suggested Mrs. Stillingfleet.

"That is precisely what Miss St. Just said, though she expressed it rather differently. But Sir Conrad really meant it kindly. He thought I should do better in the Church than in any other profession, and that I was throwing away my best chance of success; he told me so several times, and from his point of view I daresay he was right."

"Points of view vary so much according as to whether you are looking at life from below or from above," said Stephen quietly.

"Still, I should have loved to see my only son a minister of Christ and a steward of the mysteries of God," sighed Lois.

"Mark must be content to serve God in God's way, and not in his own," her father replied.

"I would not, of course, have my son act otherwise than according to the guidance of God; but I cannot help

wishing that it had pleased God to call him to be one of His ministers."

"And so He would have done, had He not known that Mark could serve Him better as a layman."

"As I feel sure Mark will," said Lois; yet her sweet face was still a little sad.

"I think I know what my mother means," interposed Mark, "and that is, that sometimes God seems to be a little blind to His Own concerns. I don't want to say anything irreverent; but it does appear now and then as if He were not only unmindful of our interests, but also of His Own. Look at my father's death, for instance: a man struck down in the plenitude of his powers, while he was using those powers solely and entirely to the glory of God."

"I know—I know!" cried Lois; "and now, alas! so much good must be left undone which he alone could accomplish, so much duty must be neglected which he alone could fulfil. And it seems as if even God Himself must be always the poorer for that."

"So thought Elijah in the wilderness," said Stephen, "when he prayed that he might die, because the Lord's Covenant was forsaken and His altars were thrown down and His prophets were slain with the sword. We most of us, some time or another, have to go by the way of the juniper-tree: and at such times we find our answer, as did the prophet of old, not in any explicit justification of the dealings of God with men, set forth in clear and definite terms by the Almighty Himself; but in that still, small Voice Which bids us return on our way to Damascus, and there take up again the appointed task allotted to us, without asking any questions."

"My grandfather is right," said Mark, tenderly taking Lois's hand in his; "God knows His Own business best, as well as ours."

"It seems to me," Stephen continued, "that we are none of us sufficiently single-minded. We many of us wish to

serve God, but we particularly wish to do it in our own fashion—and that is just what He won't have."

"And even when we set out to seek His kingdom and righteousness," added Mark, "we expect to get a look in at the kingdoms of this world on the way."

"Yes, yes," said Stephen eagerly, "that is just it! If we will only set ourselves solely to the seeking of the kingdom, all the other things shall be added unto us; but when we try to make the best of both worlds at once, we lose the way to the kingdom, and the other things are not added, either."

"I have often noticed," remarked his daughter, "that the people who desire some one thing inordinately—that is to say, setting their will in the matter before God's—nearly always fail to get it; while that very thing is freely given to others who have set the seeking of the kingdom first."

"I quite agree with you," Mark said. "The people who seek the best, find the best; but those who deliberately set out in search of the second-best, don't even get that, but only some fifth-rate makeshift instead."

"I do not think that as yet men rightly understand the enormous power of spirituality," said Stephen,—“the tremendous hold which it has upon the minds of people when once they are brought into contact with it.”

"Do you mean upon even the minds of worldly people?" asked Mark.

"I do. Remember that even the most worldly and materialistic man is made in the image of God, and that God breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and made him a living soul. Therefore in every man there is an unquenchable spark of the Godhead; and when this spark comes into contact with the same Divine fire in other men, it flashes into recognition."

"Given that the fire is fire from heaven, with no element of self or of the world!"

"Yes; the fire must be pure, or else there will be

no answering spark. I have learned that what is itself intrinsically good, will always command the homage of men ; but it must be actually good, not merely approximately so. As you say, the least atom of the old leaven of malice and wickedness leavens the whole lump, and renders it unfit ever to be counted as the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth."

"That is so," agreed Mark.

Stephen went on :

"It has always seemed to me that spiritual power loses in strength the moment it becomes allied and identified with temporal power. It was when it became one of the foremost entities of the great political powers of Europe, that the Church of Rome was split asunder by the Reformation, and lost its spiritual ascendancy over the western half of the western world ; and I hold that, in the same way, the vital power of the Reformed Churches is over when they begin to haggle over temporal rights. There was no shadow of the spirit of this world resting on the mysticism of John Wesley and his immediate followers. As their very hymns testify, they acknowledged themselves strangers and sojourners, having here no continuing city ; and I believe that this was the reason why Methodism swept over the country as the Spirit of God Himself, moving upon the face of the dark waters of religious apathy and stagnation, and awakening the Church of England as well as Nonconformity to light and life."

"In smaller things the same rule holds good," said Mark ; "it is the people who, in giving up, hold something back, that complain of ingratitude. I have often come across instances of that. When a man tells me that he has sacrificed himself to others and received nothing in return, I know that, after the manner of Ananias and Sapphira, he has kept back part of the price ; for if a man really gives all, then good measure pressed down and shaken together and running over shall men give into his bosom."

"You are right, my son ; it is not enough to be nearly spiritual or nearly unselfish—one must be wholly so to do any lasting good."

"Yes, mother ; and as a matter of fact the partially religious and partially unselfish people are the worst off of all ; they fall between two stools. They are too good to help themselves out of the mammon of unrighteousness, and not quite good enough to be admitted into the number of those who seek first the kingdom, and then get all the other things thrown in."

"Bear my words in mind," said Stephen, rising from his seat, and walking slowly towards the house, "if a man is ready to give up all for God—to seek God's kingdom absolutely and in singleness of heart, with no faintest thought of serving himself and his own interests at the same time, that man will strike a chord in the hearts of his fellow-men which no wiles of the world or the flesh or the devil shall succeed in putting to silence. The Divinity that is in him will call to the Divinity that is in them, and that call must and will be responded to."

Mark also rose and walked beside Stephen, lending the old man a helping arm.

"Yes," he added, "water finds its own level, whether it be in the natural or the spiritual world ; and when deep calleth unto deep, the Lord that sitteth above the water-flood will see that the call is answered."

CHAPTER IX

TO REPORT PROGRESS

You said you had my spirit's lore
All at your finger's ends,
Yet never found that we were more
Than friends.

—*Love's Argument.*

THE next five years passed over the heads of the Claytons as quickly as uneventful years have a habit of passing; nothing changed—not even the Government. The Duke of Mershire still reigned as Premier, and the Liberal party was still in power. There was no doubt that each year of capable rule and administrative ability strengthened the Home Secretary's position both in the Cabinet and in the country; and it was gradually becoming a generally accepted article of the Liberal creed that when the Duke of Mershire retired from the Premiership, Sir Conrad Clayton would take his place. Since the death of the then Chancellor of the Exchequer, three years previously, Sir Conrad had led the party in the House of Commons; and it was universally acknowledged that the century had not produced a wiser or a more efficient leader than he.

Lady Clayton was as handsome as ever, and her political receptions grew increasingly popular. The years, as they rolled on, seemed but to augment her absorbing devotion to her distinguished lord and master.

Eileen St. Just was still unmarried, and so (or perhaps it would be more accurate to say therefore) was Archie

Clayton. She was extremely popular in society, and had her full share of lovers ; but at present she preferred a single life, which certainly suited her admirably. Archie proposed to her, and she refused him, at decent intervals. He believed that any man can marry any woman if only he will ask her often enough, and that successful wooing is generally rather a matter of time than of circumstance : and his notion was not altogether an incorrect one, given that there are no other Richmonds in the field ; but in making his calculations Archibald forgot to take into account the other Richmond—a mathematical error not altogether uncommon even among better arithmeticians than poor Archie.

Meanwhile to that other Richmond, whose name was Mark Stillingfleet, time had brought considerable honour and a goodly portion of the things of this world, if it had not altogether succeeded in healing his damaged heart. He had returned to Oxford soon after that momentous visit to Castle Carnoch, smarting from the idea—so successfully implanted by the well-intentioned Sophy—that Miss St. Just had played with his affections ; and still more deeply hurt because she had, according to the aforementioned conscientious tale-bearer, spoken lightly of his physical infirmity. He therefore sought solace for his wounded pride in the hardest of hard work. He was a man of rare intellectual power, and from his earliest years his natural gifts had been carefully trained and disciplined. At Oxford, while not altogether neglecting the social advantages of that pleasantest of cities, he had always read hard. He now determined that if Eileen chose to ridicule his feeble physical powers, she should at least have cause to respect his intellectual gifts ; and he set about preparing for his Final Schools with a grim determination that placed the result beyond doubt. His First in Greats was pronounced, by those qualified to judge, as one of the most brilliant of recent years. He carried

off the *Ireland* and the *Craven*; and wound up his university career with a fellowship which enabled him to tide over the years while he was reading law. His success at the Bar promised to be rapid—partly owing, no doubt, to the reputation which he had won at Oxford, but even more perhaps to a little judicious pushing on the part of Sir Conrad.

The Home Secretary, while baulked in his desire to compromise with the Unseen Power by means of ecclesiastical advancement, still clung to the idea of making reparation through Mark. Therefore he lost no opportunity of helping with his influence the budding barrister; and he cherished dreams of providing Mark at the next General Election with a seat in Parliament.

It so happened that during the last five years Mark had not met Eileen again at Castle Carnoch; but he had frequently seen her in London and at Tettleigh Towers, Sir Conrad's country house in Mershire, and a very pleasant friendship had sprung up between these two brilliant young people. In spite of all their mutual friendliness, however, Mark studiously refrained from making love to Miss St. Just. In the first place he recognized that, notwithstanding his so far successful career, the son of a country doctor with his way to make in the world, was no fitting mate for the sole daughter of the wealthy and noble house of St. Just; it would be an impertinence on his part even to think of such a thing. And on the other hand, he could not forget that Eileen had once (so he believed) laughed at that physical deformity about which he was so abnormally sensitive. Like any other man worthy of the name, Mark felt he could not stoop to the indignity of being married out of pity, nor could he endure the thought of bestowing his attentions upon any woman to whom he himself was personally repulsive. Therefore he laid down the rule that nothing warmer than the most Platonic friendship was ever to be permitted between himself and Miss St. Just; and he

abode by this rule as if it had been a law of the Medes and Persians.

Changes must come at last, however long they may tarry by the way. The Government had lived through its allotted span of life, and its natural and inevitable death was fast approaching. But the Duke of Mershire and Sir Conrad Clayton were wise in their day and generation, and postponed the dissolution until they had discovered such a cry to set before the country as might enable them to rise Phoenix-like from their own ashes, and thus ensure the Liberals another six years of office.

At last it came to pass that a motion was brought forward by the leader of the Opposition, stating that, in the opinion of the House, it was expedient to establish a Roman Catholic University in Ireland; and at once Sir Conrad found a cry ready to his hand—a tocsin which he imagined would rouse the Protestant spirit dormant in the English-speaking peoples, and would secure for himself and his party a great victory at the General Election. To his surprise, the Prime Minister did not agree with him. The duke was an older man than Sir Conrad, and had learned that there is a still more deeply rooted growth than that of Protestantism (strong though that be) indigenous to British soil—a growth which had become a goodly tree, stretching forth its branches over all the land, before ever Protestantism was even dreamed of—the inherent English love of liberty.

But for once Sir Conrad had his way, supported, as he was, by the majority of his colleagues in the Cabinet; and the duke gave in. The motion was brought forward, was duly opposed by the Government, and was carried by a large majority, as all the Roman Catholic members and a good number of independent Liberals voted with the Conservatives on this occasion.

There was therefore nothing left to the Government but to appeal to the country on this momentous question, and they at once announced their intention of dissolving. But

for many reasons it was thought desirable that the General Election should not take place immediately; so the business of the session was brought to a close, and it was announced that Parliament would be dissolved in the late autumn.

In the interval between the end of the session and the General Election, the Home Secretary and his family repaired to Castle Carnoch; and there Mark and Eileen found themselves once more together in the house at which at least one of them had tasted sundry bitter experiences five years ago. Of course the Bamfields were staying there; and so was the celebrated doctor, Sir Basil Forbes, M.P.

One sunny afternoon, early in September, the men had been out for a day's shooting on the moors, twelve miles from Castle Carnoch; Eileen had accompanied them, walking after the guns, as she was an indefatigable lover of exercise. Sir Conrad and his guests were crossing a corner of the moor to a spot where the carriage had been put up in a shed.

"I shall keep the cartridges in my gun till we get to the carriage," the host said, "in case I come across a bird or two by the way."

They were tramping merrily along—Sir Conrad, with Mark and Archie on either side of him, in front, and Eileen chatting with Sir Basil just behind (Gregory had not been able to come out that day on account of one of his headaches), when suddenly the Home Secretary put his foot into a rabbit-hole among the heather, and fell forward upon his face; and as he fell, his gun went off, discharging its contents into the tweed-clad figure at his side.

Sir Conrad knew at once what had happened, though for a moment he could not see; for he heard the young man cry out and fall to the ground almost simultaneously with his own fall. And as he lay on his face for that fraction of a second, as long as eternity itself, which comes between our knowledge of any great catastrophe and our realization

of it, the words of the old preacher again rushed through his mind :

“Thou shalt heap up riches, but thy firstborn shall never gather them ; thou shalt make a great name for thyself, but thy firstborn shall not bear it after thee. And if thou shalt cry unto God for thy firstborn He shall not hearken, forasmuch as thou hast not hearkened when this woman cried for her firstborn unto thee !”

CHAPTER X

EILEEN TO THE RESCUE

Vainly I looked in your face, and vainly
Felt my heart thrill as I touched your hand :
I was unable to speak more plainly—
You were unable to understand.

—*Verses Wise or Otherwise.*

BUT when, after that eternal second spent with his face in the heather, Sir Conrad again looked up, he found that he was only partially correct in his conclusions. True, the charge from his gun had entered the body of one of the young men beside him ; but it was Mark, and not Archie, whom he had accidentally stricken to the earth. In the act of falling he must have turned his gun so that it had shot the man to the left of him and not the man on his right.

For the next few minutes all was panic and confusion ; but fortunately the great doctor was on the spot to take the control of affairs into his own hands.

Under his directions they managed to carry the unconscious Mark to the carriage, and so convey him to Castle Carnoch ; and it was a great relief to them all, and especially to Sir Conrad, to learn, when the doctor had made a more careful examination than he was able to do on the moor, that the wounds, though serious, were not fatal. In fact Mark was so much better on the following day that Sir Conrad and Archie carried out their original intention of going up to London on some important

business, leaving Sir Basil to look after the invalid and the ladies until their return; and Gregory and his wife went on to pay another visit at a neighbouring shoot.

It was on the next night but one after Sir Conrad's departure that the doctor came into the drawing-room at the castle, looking very grave. It was not late; but Lady Clayton had already retired, feeling somewhat overdone with the excitement of the last three days; and Eileen was sitting alone over the peat fire reading the latest novel.

She looked up as Sir Basil entered.

"What is the matter?" she cried as soon as she saw his face.

"I'm in a great state about Stillingfleet. I'm afraid he is dying."

"Dying?—Mark dying?" and the girl's face went as white as the dress she wore. "But I thought you said he was much better and the wound was beginning to heal?"

"That was true. The wound is going on all right now, but he is in a state of collapse, and I doubt if I can succeed in pulling him round. Come up to his room with me; I daren't leave him for more than a minute."

"Shall I go and call Lady Clayton? She will be in a dreadful way; she is so fond of Mark."

"No, the poor woman is overdone already—she looked a perfect wreck at dinner this evening. She'd be no use if she came; and, goodness knows, I don't want another invalid on my hands!"

"Is no one with him now?" asked Eileen, as with a throbbing heart she followed the doctor up the grand staircase.

"Yes, the footman who waits on him; but he is so stupid he is worse than nobody, and the maidservants who come up to help me are stupider still. That is why I came down to fetch you."

They entered Mark's room, and Sir Basil summarily dismissed the well-meaning but inefficient footman. Then he set about injecting brandy into the veins of the unconscious man, Eileen swiftly and noiselessly helping him.

"He is sinking fast; he has hardly any pulse at all," said the doctor, his finger on Mark's wrist.

"And can nothing save him?"

"I am afraid not. You see, he was such a delicate, anæmic man to begin with, that he had no strength to spare. I should have had no difficulty in pulling Sir Conrad or Archie through a business like this, though it would have knocked them over for a bit. But with Stillingfleet it is a different matter. He has no stamina, no reserve of strength, and he is now dying of collapse."

Eileen's face was pale and drawn, but she did not cry; some misfortunes are too terrible for tears.

"But he is so gifted, so brilliant! He would have done wonderful things if he'd lived—I know he would."

"Yes, he is a most promising young fellow. I agree with you that there is hardly anything he could not have done if he had tried—scarcely any intellectual feat too great for him to accomplish; and now it is all cut short by a chance shot. Truly God's Providence is sometimes very mysterious."

Eileen wrung her hands in agony: it all seemed so cruel—such a needless waste!

"Can nothing be done?" she groaned. "Are you quite sure?"

"He is sinking fast," repeated Sir Basil, his hand still on Mark's wrist.

"Oh! save him, save him! For pity's sake save him! Surely God cannot be so cruel as to let him die like this! Is there nothing—nothing—that could save his life?"

"There is one thing," answered Sir Basil slowly, "which might save him; but I am afraid it is out of the question here and now."

Eileen pleaded with the doctor, as if in his capable hands lay the issues of life and death.

"What is it—what is it? At any rate tell me what it is."

"The only thing which could save Stillingfleet's life and restore him to animation would be an injection from the veins of some strong and healthy person to make up to him the blood that he has lost—as, unless that loss is made up, and at once, he must surely die."

Eileen hid her face in her hands and moaned.

"Oh dear—oh dear! it is too hard for this to be the end of everything!"

"I have all the needful instruments with me," said the doctor, "as I came on here after performing an operation near Edinburgh, where I thought it possible that the subsequent hemorrhage might necessitate their use; and I would gladly give the poor fellow out of my own veins the vitality of which he is in such dire want, but I could not do so and perform the operation at the same time."

The girl looked up eagerly.

"But I'm here," she cried. "You are forgetting me!"

Sir Basil started.

"By heaven, I never thought of you! But no, I could not run the risk with you, my dear."

"Oh, yes, yes, you could! And I'm tremendously well and strong, you know. I've never had a day's illness since I was born. I've health and strength enough for two."

Sir Basil shook his head; but the girl still pleaded with him, all her heart in her beautiful eyes:

"Let me—oh, do let me save his life! Think what a splendid thing it will be for me in the future, when he has climbed to the top of the tree, to feel that it was really I who helped him to it all! I should never let him know, of course; but I should know it myself, and it would make me so gloriously happy."

"But, my dear child,"—the doctor's voice was very tender,—“you do not quite realize what you ask. Although the risk to you would be small, still I must admit that there would be a risk—a possibility of my not being able to close the artery which I had opened in your arm, and so of your bleeding to death yourself.”

“I don't care. Even if I die, what is my life compared with his? I shall never be anything all my days but a silly society butterfly; but he, if he lives, may some day do work for God and for England which will last for ever. I know him, and I know what is in him, and I have wonderful visions of the great things he is going to do.”

The man in Sir Basil yearned over the splendid young creature who thus entreated him; and the doctor in him was sorely tempted to perform the miracle ready to his hand, and so save the patient's life. But he still reasoned:

“My dear, why should you, one of the most brilliant girls in society and the last representative of one of the oldest families in Ireland, endanger your life for the sake of a comparative stranger?”

“Because he is one of the best and cleverest and truest and noblest and most honourable men that ever lived; and because——” here the clear pallor of the girl's face was exchanged for a burning blush—“because I love him.”

“Ah!” At last the doctor saw how the land lay. “Let me think for a minute.”

Eileen was silent, watching him with anxious eyes. After a pause, which seemed to her as if composed of æons, Sir Basil said:

“Yes, I will let you have your way. Your last argument is unanswerable. It is one of the prerogatives of love that one may lay down one's life for the beloved. Bare your arm.”

"I have only one stipulation to make," said Eileen, as she obeyed him and he made the necessary preparations; "and that is, that you will promise never, without my leave, to tell Mark that I have done this for him."

"I promise."

"On your word of honour?"

"On my word of honour."

"Then that's all right," said Eileen, offering her beautifully moulded arm to the doctor.

"Look here, my dear, many people would say that it is utterly unjustifiable of me to take you at your word in this way and let you do what you ask; and I'm not at all sure that they wouldn't be right. But somehow it seems to me a terrible thing to stand between people and their best impulses—to come between them and the work God has given them to do."

"Yes, yes; but do be quick, or else Mark will die."

"No, he won't. He will live yet to serve God and England; and to you—under God—will be all the glory."

Swiftly and silently the skilled hands of the great surgeon made incisions in the arm of the girl and of the man, and directed the current of the blood from the one to flow into the veins of the other. Eileen sat quite still, with a light in her blue eyes which had never shone there before. She had known for some time that she had no other friend as congenial as Mark Stillingfleet; but not until the moment of his need and her response to it, did she realize that she loved him.

In all good women there is a dominant passion of renunciation—an unquenchable longing to sacrifice themselves to the being whom they love best. Weak natures are ready to beg; but in strong ones the ruling desire is to grant—to pour themselves out in a living libation even more blessed to the giver than to him that receives. The more that is asked of them, the more abundant their gifts; and the

more abundant their gifts, the greater their love. The very demand creates and increases the supply.

Eileen St. Just was far too proud a woman to bestow her affection upon any man who did not love her ; but she knew perfectly well, with an unerring feminine instinct in such matters, that Mark had loved her in the old days at Castle Carnoch, though she would not admit, even to herself, that his sudden and inexplicable transition from obvious love into the most Platonic of friendships had caused her considerable pain as well as surprise. But his helplessness and need had roused in her the motherhood latent in the heart of every true woman ; and to his unconscious appeal she responded with the whole force of her generous nature.

She did not speak until Sir Basil had finished the operation, and had deftly and successfully bound up the two arms, during which time she had never flinched nor shown the slightest shadow of nervousness ; then she calmly asked :

“ Is it all right ? Will he live ? ”

“ Yes, my dear child, we have tided over the crisis, and his life is saved. And let me tell you in conclusion that both morally and physically you are the most splendid woman I ever saw or ever hope to see,” replied Sir Basil, as he went out of the room to wash his instruments, leaving Eileen alone with the man whose life she had saved.

As she looked at the still unconscious form upon the bed, her heart was moved at the sight of him as the trees are moved by the wind. Surely this man would live to do great things ; and, though he might never know it, he was hers, all hers, by the Divine right of redemption ; it was her life offered for his which had redeemed him from the very gates of death. As long as they both should live, his triumphs would be her triumphs, his honours her honours ; without her he would have done nothing, but would have ended his story ere it was begun. And as she thought on these things

a sudden impulse made her stoop to kiss the broad forehead, on which the fair hair lay in scattered locks. But half way she stopped. No, she said to herself, she might give her life-blood unsought, but never her kisses; those she would keep until Mark himself should ask for them; and, if he never asked for them, no man should taste them as long as she lived.

CHAPTER XI

MORE BRIBERY

What though my heart was a mark for Cupid?

What though our way lay through fairyland?

All availed nothing since you—you stupid!—

You were unable to understand.

—Verses Wise or Otherwise.

MARK lay ill at Castle Carnoch for some weeks, making a slow return to health; and during that time nothing could exceed the devotion of the Claytons to him. In a way, they all felt greatly obliged to him—though he was no more responsible for it than they were—for having been shot instead of Archie; and this debt of obligation lay with a special weight upon Sir Conrad.

Eileen was allowed to come and sit with Mark sometimes, as he grew stronger; but her visits were not altogether a success. In his present feeble condition, the restraint which he always put upon himself in the presence of the woman he loved became an effort almost beyond his strength; and consequently he was alternately silent and irritable while Eileen was with him. Of course neither he nor anyone else, save Sir Basil, knew of the girl's heroic action; her stipulation that the doctor should keep it a profound secret had been faithfully followed. But unconsciously her manner to Mark was tenderer when he was ill than when he was well; and this tenderness on her part greatly increased the young man's difficulty in keeping their friendship on a purely Platonic basis.

Mark's ungraciousness soon worked out its inevitable result. Eileen, perceiving that her kindness was not acceptable to him, and not guessing the reason of his stubborn reserve, soon drew back into her shell, and became once more the brilliant and haughty Miss St. Just whom London knew so well. If he did not choose to show his love for her, she was far too proud to show her love for him, for the which all womanly women will commend her; but her apparent coldness merely rooted poor Mark the more firmly in his conviction that her gentleness towards him was prompted merely by a half-contemptuous pity for a man so lacking in all outward signs of manliness as himself; and he resented and smarted under it accordingly.

Sophy, too, in her usual well-meaning but blundering fashion, made matters worse by saying to him one day, when his convalescence was nearly complete:

"I hope, dear Mark, that the fuss Eileen St. Just has made about you during your illness will not lay you under any false impression as to her feelings towards you which may eventually give you pain?"

"I'm sure I hope not either; heaven knows I have had enough pain to satisfy any fellow for the present."

"That is why I should be so grieved for you to have any more; and I am so afraid that Eileen's kindness may delude you into thinking that she cares for you more than she does."

"Hang it all, Sophy! can't a good woman fulfil her Christian duty of visiting the sick without a man's being such an ass as to construe her charity into anything warmer than the strictly Pauline sense of the word?" Mark was distinctly cross.

"Still Eileen's manner is often misleading—especially to men. I have often noticed that women with grey or blue eyes take men in more than women with brown ones do; I suppose they can put more feeling into them." And Sophy sighed as she thought upon her own pretty yet expressionless hazel orbs.

"Well, I can promise you that Miss St. Just's blue eyes won't take me in ; I know my place a bit too well for that."

"But," Sophy hastened to assure him, "father says—and so does Sir Basil—that you'll be a great man some day if you live."

"That's very kind of them ! But whatever success I may get, I shall never be the equal of Miss St. Just."

"Oh, no, of course not ! And those real aristocrats do think such a tremendous lot of birth. Now my Gregory, for instance, looks down upon anybody who isn't well born, however distinguished they may be in other ways ; and the St. Justs are quite as old a family as the Bamfields, and peers into the bargain."

Mark writhed.

"My dear girl, I am not likely to forget the immense social gulf between us, I can assure you."

"And then"—Sophy had a reprehensible habit of thinking aloud, quite irrespective of her hearer's feelings—"those very strong, healthy people always shrink from anything that is weak or sickly or de—I mean, not quite all right, you know. Their perfect health makes them hard and unsympathetic, I suppose, so that they despise anyone less physically splendid than themselves. Archie is like that, as well as Eileen ; they haven't an atom of sympathy with poor Gregory when he isn't well, but are most shockingly hard on him. It really isn't right, but I suppose they can't help it, being so strong themselves."

Mark writhed again.

"Should you object to change the subject ? It isn't a particularly cheerful one, if you don't mind."

"Certainly not, dear Mark. We'll talk about anything you like. I only wanted just to give you a hint, to save you unnecessary pain." And Sophy chatted upon indifferent matters, unconscious of having done about as much harm in the time as any really good-hearted woman possibly could.

While Mark was slowly regaining health and strength, Sir Conrad was busy with plans for the squaring of that Power Which once again had lifted an unseen Hand to strike down Archie, and once again had spared the lad at the last moment. That Archie's salvation was permanent, the Home Secretary did not for a moment believe : he held that his own punishment was merely delayed, not remitted. But he felt that one more chance was yet given him to come to terms with that immutable Justice Which years and years ago he had defied. Yet even while he endeavoured to temporize with that Justice, he trembled before the immutability of Its decrees. Truly what he asked had been given him ; the measure that he had meted out to others had been exactly measured out to him. While he recognized the absolute righteousness of the Unknown God's dealings with himself, he set about devising some fresh means whereby that God might be persuaded to go back from what was undoubtedly His due in the unholy bargain which Conrad Clayton had once dared to make between Eternal Justice and his own sinful soul ; and again the instrument of reparation which Conrad chose was Mark Stillingfleet.

"By the way, Stillingfleet," he said one day, coming into the drawing-room at Castle Carnoch, and finding Mark and Eileen together (for these two were gradually becoming friends again, now that the former was strong enough to crush down his love once more and assume the outward demeanour of Platonism), "I have had a letter from one of our Whips saying that they want a Liberal candidate for Merchester ; and I wonder if you would care to stand."

Mark's pale face flushed with excitement.

"I should like it of all things, only——"

Sir Conrad raised his hand in protest.

"No 'buts' or 'onlys' this time, my dear Mark. I know what you were going to say : that you doubted if you could afford the expenses of an election thus early in

your career. But you need not trouble about that ; I have already told the Whips that, as I am not being opposed in my constituency, I will pay the expenses of the Merchester election out of my own pocket, if they can find a suitable candidate ; and they now write to ask if there is no one that I can suggest."

"You are too generous, Sir Conrad," began Mark ; but Eileen interrupted him :

"Now, Mr. Stillingfleet, for goodness' sake don't begin to have scruples about anything so unscrupulous as an election ! I can't stand people who bring their consciences into politics—I really can't. Scruples in an election are like flies in amber ; the flies are stifled and the amber is spoiled, and their only value lies in the rarity of the combination."

"Besides——" Mark began again, and again Eileen interrupted him.

"Now you're going to pretend that you are too humble to accept the post, because really you are too proud to accept the offer ; and let me tell you, Mr. Stillingfleet, there is nothing less artistically effective than the pride which apes humility. It plays its part so well that as a rule it is mistaken for lack of self-respect. Other people can't always understand that because you think them beneath contempt, you behave as if you yourself were !"

"Well, Mark, what do you say ?" asked the Home Secretary.

"I think that Miss St. Just as usual is right, and that if you are so generous as to offer to pay my election expenses, it would be very ungrateful on my part to refuse."

"Bravo, Mr. Stillingfleet ! Actually to see what is pointed out to you ! I was afraid you were going to be obstinate and to look the other way ; and I've no patience with people who deliberately blindfold themselves with their eyes open, and then wonder that they make mistakes. I confess I am agreeably surprised in you. You haven't

turned out as immaculate as I expected, and I think all the better of you for it."

Sir Conrad interrupted her.

"You'll stand, then, Stillingfleet, on the Liberal side, and let me pay the piper?"

Many men are sufficiently generous graciously to bestow favours, but fewer sufficiently so to accept them with equal graciousness. Mark belonged to this finely-fibred minority.

"Thank you more than I can say," he replied, "for giving me the chance of my life. I accept it with deep gratitude, and I'll do my best not to disappoint you or myself."

"Then that's all right," said the Home Secretary, sitting down. "To tell you the truth," he continued, "I am greatly surprised at the sympathy which a certain section of the party—notably the Duke of Mershire—have shown with this absurd proposal of the Opposition. The country does not want a Roman Catholic University—won't have a Roman Catholic University; and a strenuous opposition to this Bill would ensure the return of the Liberals to power, and would keep us there for as long as we liked. Now the suspected sympathy of the Duke with the Tories in this measure will merely serve as an excuse for breaking up our party, and will give the other side a comfortable and unbroken six years of office. But that is the worst of having a Prime Minister in the Upper House; he lives with his head in the clouds, and so knows nothing of the pulse of the party nor of the feelings of the rank and file."

"I see," remarked Miss St. Just; "just as we should know nothing of what goes on in the servants' hall if we didn't have our maids to brush our hair, and so take our heads out of the clouds."

"Precisely," the Home Secretary agreed.

"It would be rather a good thing," Eileen went on, "to

arrange for a commoner to brush the hair of the Prime Minister every night ; then he'd know who wanted to give notice, and who wasn't satisfied with their wages, and who was quarrelling with whom, and all the useful little items of information that one can only gain during the brushing process."

Sir Conrad laughed.

"There would be decided advantages in the arrangement. But the commoner who undertook to brush common-sense into the Duke of Mershire's head, would have his hands full."

"Not of hair, though," retorted Eileen.

"Who's making personal remarks now?" quoted Mark.

Eileen lifted her chin contemptuously, but otherwise did not deign to vouchsafe a reply. Then Mark turned to the Home Secretary and said seriously :

"Stop a bit, Sir Conrad, we are going a little too fast. If you expect me to speak against the Roman Catholic University, I am afraid I must decline your offer, for my sympathies and my convictions are entirely in favour of it."

"In favour of that absurd idea?" gasped Sir Conrad. "I never heard such folly!"

"Still, that is how I think and feel ; and I cannot speak and vote against my convictions, can I?"

"Why not? I've done so scores of times."

Mark's face flushed.

"Well anyway, I can't. I am made like that, I suppose. So all I can do is to decline your most generous offer, and leave the place to a man of your way of thinking. I'm awfully sorry to disagree with you, Sir Conrad, and awfully disappointed to forego a chance for which I've been wishing and waiting for years ; but I don't see what else I can do."

"Stop a bit, my boy ; it is you who are going too fast now. I tell you candidly that if you support this proposal you won't win the seat ; but that is no reason why you shouldn't fight it."

"The fact that you can't win a thing is no reason why you won't lose it," murmured the irrepressible Eileen; "I've often noticed that."

"And to fight, even if you don't win, constitutes a claim upon your party," added Sir Conrad,—“a claim which will be of infinite use to a young man in your profession.”

"But I couldn't run the election with your money, yet not along your lines."

"Nonsense, my dear boy! You are over-scrupulous. As long as you fight in the Liberal cause, I don't care a fig which branch of the party you support. When it comes to a General Election, the battle is between Liberals and Conservatives. The only difference, as I said before, is this—that if you oppose this mad idea you'll win the election, and if you support it you'll lose; for anybody who is in favour of the University will naturally vote for the Tory candidate, and those who are against it will not vote for you unless you are against it too. Besides in all probability, when the Liberals find out that you are on the Conservative side in this matter, they will bring out an Independent Labour man, who will absorb all the Protestant votes. Still if you stand and lose as a Liberal, I shall feel that I have done my duty to the party by enabling you to try to wrest Manchester from the Tories. But I tell you candidly that if you want to tickle the palate of the British public, you must offer them sound Protestantism with a strong Presbyterian flavour; otherwise they'll ring the bell for the plates to be changed and the dishes removed."

Eileen looked at Sir Conrad through her long eyelashes.

"You remind me of the man who said of his party, 'I must follow them because I'm their leader.' Leadership apparently is the exact science of sequence."

"Don't be impertinent, my dear," said the Home Secretary with a smile; but he was annoyed all the same. It is quite possible for a clever woman to be too clever; and it

takes fully thirty years for a brilliant woman to learn when to be stupid; but the art, when acquired, is the coping-stone of her wit.

"I can't help feeling," said Mark, "that the Duke of Mershire is right in this matter."

"Anyway, he is behaving like a fool, and he will smash up the party irretrievably."

Sir Conrad had not yet recovered his temper.

"Still, there is something higher than one's duty to one's party," the younger man persisted, "and that is one's duty to one's country: and Roman Catholic Irishmen are just as much British subjects as Anglicans or Nonconformists, and have their rights as such. It sounds horribly priggish to say this, and especially to you; but I can't help thinking it."

"It seems to me, Stillingfleet, that you are half a Roman yourself."

"Indeed I'm not! I'm a very Anglican of the Anglicans, and have no sympathy at all with what I consider the errors of the Roman branch of the Catholic Church. But that doesn't blind me to the fact that because I don't agree with a man's religious opinions, I am justified in interfering with his civil rights. After all, the Romans have as much right to a University as we have. And I'd go further myself; I'd have Nonconformist Universities endowed by the State, if the Nonconformists wished it."

"You are indeed broad in your sympathies!" sneered Sir Conrad.

But Mark's blood was up, and he was not to be silenced by sneers.

"I hope I am; I try to be. All roads lead to the same goal—all Christianity begins and ends in Christ. God forbid that I should ever put a stumbling-block in the midst of any path which may bring one poor sinner to Him!"

Eileen looked at the young man with sparkling eyes.

He very rarely spoke of the things dearest to him ; but when he did, her heart always thrilled at his touch.

"Besides," he went on, "how can we condemn the narrowness of Rome if we show ourselves equally narrow ? I consider that the adaptability of the Church of England is one of its most marked superiorities to the Church of Rome ; for in adaptability is union, and in union is strength."

"And you think that as a Church gets more adaptable it gets stronger ?" asked Eileen.

"I am sure it does. If Rome had been sufficiently adaptable, the Reformation would have been no splitting-off, but an inward awakening and strengthening ; if the Anglican Church of the eighteenth century had been more adaptable, the Evangelical Revival would likewise have brought men into the fold instead of driving them out. Think what the Christian Church would be to-day if the Reformation had been a true reform and not a revolution ! Think what the Church of England would be to-day if the Evangelical Revival had doubled instead of halving it !"

Sir Conrad was interested in spite of himself.

"Yes, you are right there. But politicians have to deal with things as they are, not as they ought to be ; and just now the way to please the British public is to stir up the spirit of Protestantism. Not that I care one way or another myself : Romanism and Revivalism are alike absurd to me ; but one must adapt oneself to one's public."

"There again I disagree with you. Miss St. Just was right when she said that leadership was something higher than scientific sequence ; statecraft is not the art of giving the constituencies what is pleasant, but of teaching them what is right—and of helping them to do it, too. The British public is not a spoiled child, being coaxed into learning its lessons by some rotten Kindergarten system, or 'Reading without Tears.' It is a great nation, at heart loving righteousness and hating iniquity ; and it is crying out for

a man to lead it into the truth, and not for a nursemaid to pamper it into obedience."

"Yes, yes," cried Eileen, "that is it! And it will follow that man to the death, though he blames and reproaches it; but it despises the nursemaid even when it is swallowing her lollipops."

"And the time for lollipops is over," continued Mark. "The English people is come of age, and has attained to the full stature of a man; and my firm belief is that the statesman who realizes this—who sets aside all trickeries and blandishments, and appeals straight to the heart of a great and God-fearing nation, neither cringing to consequences nor pandering to prejudices—will never appeal in vain."

CHAPTER XII

THE RESULT OF THE POLL

Children in the market-place,
Merrily I piped to you ;
Yet the dance which was my due
Ne'er was trod with dainty pace.
—*Verses Wise or Otherwise.*

IT must be admitted that Mark's views on the question of the hour made Sir Conrad's position with regard to the Mercheater seat somewhat difficult. It was generally known that the Prime Minister sympathized with the minority of his party on this point, so that a certain latitude had become necessary with respect to old members who were seeking re-election. But the Whips not unnaturally expected new candidates to adopt the official attitude on the all-important question. Sir Conrad had identified himself with the ultra-Protestant wing of the Liberal party—had indeed become its chief spokesman—so that it was exceptionally difficult for him to recommend as a candidate a man whose heresy on the critical question was so pronounced. But Sir Conrad had made up his mind and he would not be baulked. Great is the power of the purse—great was the influence of the Home Secretary—and these two potentates prevailed over the opposition of a zealous red-tapery. When the chief Whip expressed a polite wonder that so sturdy a champion of the Protestant cause should nominate so unorthodox a candidate, Sir Conrad roughly remarked that as he was paying the piper

he had the right to call the *tuné*. When the party managers of East Merchester seemed disinclined to be amenable to reason, the Home Secretary reminded them of the Tory majority, and asked whether they could afford to be particular as to every item of the Liberal creed in a candidate who was prepared to lead a forlorn hope. So Sir Conrad had his way : and at a meeting of the Liberal Four Hundred, Mark Stillingfleet, in consideration of his great abilities and promise and of his undoubted general acceptance of Liberal principles, was adopted as candidate, with liberty to hold his own views on the Roman Catholic University question.

It is not too much to say that Mark was beside himself with joy. He threw himself into the election with all the zest of a schoolboy and with a schoolboy's wild enthusiasm for a new game. But it was no mere game to him. His heart was in his work ; he longed with almost a fierce longing to win the seat, so that Eileen might know that, cripple as he was (so he quite needlessly styled himself), he could fight and he could win. But, win or lose, this one thing he could do, and the opportunity of so doing was of far more importance to him than the accident of winning a seat : he could publicly proclaim whatever of truth he believed to be in him ; he could speak out to the electors of Merchester, and perhaps through them to the nation at large, the views he held on a great public question—views which were at variance with those current in his party ; and he could appeal, apart from mere party shibboleths, to the heart of the people. He firmly believed that if he thus appealed to the electors, by an endeavour to lead public opinion rather than to curry favour with ignoble prejudice, his appeal would not be in vain.

Eileen was no less excited than Mark ; for beneath the clever irresponsibility of her brilliant conversation there was a vein of seriousness which few suspected. Mark rarely let himself go, and for that very reason, when he

did, it was all the more effective. His enthusiasm kindled a like enthusiasm in Eileen; and she felt that she would give anything, except her love for Mark, if only he might be successful.

Sir Conrad's own seat was safe; he had represented one constituency for so long that no candidate could be found daring enough to oppose him. He was thus free from all local ties, and able to assist other members of his party where help was most needed. He determined to do the thing thoroughly by Mark. Accompanied by Lady Clayton and Archie and nearly all his household, he took up his quarters at the Royal Oak Hotel. Thither, too, at her own earnest request, came Eileen, as Lady Clayton's guest. And immensely did Eileen enjoy herself. The shouting of the captains, the prancing of the horses, and all the panoply of battle excited her not a little; but when Mark rose to speak, she was thrilled with an intensity she had never felt before. Mark had had plenty of practice in speaking before the courts, but he had never before attempted to sway a popular audience. However he quickly acquired the art; and Eileen watched him, with an eager interest and a lovelight in her eyes that she vainly strove to conceal, play upon his audience as a great organist plays upon his mighty instrument. She almost worshipped him as she saw how responsive the crowd was to his every mood—how quick he was with a keen, but not too subtle, repartee to every interruption, and with what skill he always kept them in good-humour. And what she admired most was the perfect urbanity which he preserved even under strong provocation, and the ardour with which he appealed to what was highest and best in his audience, scorning to pander to their prejudices or to appeal to their greed.

At first it seemed as if it were going to be a fair fight between the two great parties, with the disadvantage to Mark that on the University question his views were antagonistic

to many, if not most, of his side; while they would not attract for him votes from his opponent, as on this point he and the Tories were agreed. But after a few days there appeared on the scene an Independent Labour candidate, a notable demagogue with a brazen voice and plenty of rough humour. He belaboured his fellow-candidates with the utmost impartiality. He had no particular religious views, so that he naturally took the popular line. His appearance was pronounced by the local political magnates as sounding the knell of Mark's chances.

"I'm afraid it's all up with you, Mark, my boy," said Sir Conrad at dinner.

"Oh, Sir Conrad!" cried Eileen disconsolately, "how can you take away the appetites which we already lost canvassing this afternoon, by such a Cassandra-like prediction."

"Very sorry, my dear, very sorry! But I've been discussing the matter with old Smithson, Mark's chairman, and he is very decided on the matter. All the Low Churchmen and the strong Protestant Dissenters on our side will, he thinks, vote for Griggs."

Griggs was the Labour candidate.

"I am not so sure of that, Sir Conrad," said Mark. "A good many of them have promised their votes to me, on the ground that in other respects they prefer me to Horace Chudleigh."

The Hon. Horace Chudleigh was the Tory candidate.

"But will they keep their promises now?" asked Eileen.

"Oh, yes, I think so! They may be fanatical, but they will keep their word," said Mark.

"Then it's a good thing Griggs did not come out sooner. You've scored one there, Mark," growled Sir Conrad. "But I'm not so sure you're right."

"Of course," said Mark quietly, "now the circumstances are changed, I shall let it be known publicly that I don't hold them to their promises."

"What?" cried the Home Secretary, aghast. "You won't try to hold them to it? Hang it, man, are you mad?"

"No, I fancy I'm all right as far as my head is concerned, Sir Conrad," replied Mark cheerfully.

Sir Conrad fell back in his chair and groaned. He knew Mark pretty well by now, and recognized that it was no good protesting against his arrant folly. But Eileen watched Mark with sparkling eyes.

On the next evening Mark held his last great meeting before the election. Hitherto he had said little on the question of the hour, but on this occasion he intended to develop his views fully. The meeting was crowded, and there were a considerable number of malcontents there. Mr. Smithson, who was in the chair, met with considerable interruption, and eventually gave up the attempt. But Sir Conrad, a practised platform-speaker, quickly obtained control over the audience. He passed lightly over Mark's heresy, and drove home all the strong points in the latter's favour. He expended a little good-humoured satire on the Conservative candidate, but reserved the vials of his wrath for Mr. Griggs, whom he indignantly denounced for dividing the party, and spoiling what would otherwise have been an excellent chance of wresting a seat from the Tories. Sir Conrad's forcible rhetoric and fiery eloquence greatly delighted the crowd, whose excitement was at fever heat when Mark Stillingfleet rose. Eileen could hardly contain herself; she thought, despite the noise of the cheering which drowned the groans of a small but determined opposition that her neighbours must hear the wild beating of her heart. But she saw that Mark was to all appearance cool and collected; a little pale perhaps, but without any trace of nervousness.

He began by a courteous reference to his principal opponent, and proceeded to attempt to soothe the susceptibilities of the working men, which had undoubtedly

been ruffled by Sir Conrad's downright and plain-spoken oratory. He regretted that they distrusted the interest he took in industrial questions and the welfare of the working population ; but he understood their preference for one of themselves as their representative, and if they considered that Mr. Griggs would be a better member than himself, in heaven's name let them vote for him. But let them remember that they had to regard not only their own personal interests, but the interests of the nation at large ; and he ventured to suggest that the return of Mr. Griggs would simply be a fresh step in the direction of the formation of small groups in the House, each prepared to sacrifice the good of the nation to the selfish interests of their own particular section. They had protested in the past against the privileges and class interests of a favoured few ; let them beware lest they sacrificed the highest principles of their party to either their own self-love or their own particular fads. At this Sir Conrad shook his head gravely, for were not the anti-vaccinationists strong, and had they not threatened to vote for the Tory candidate ? "The boy is mad," he muttered. But worse remained behind ; for Mark publicly proclaimed that he released any who had promised to vote for him in ignorance of the fact that a Labour candidate would be brought forward.

"He's mad," again muttered Sir Conrad to Eileen,—
 "stark, staring mad !"

"I don't know, Sir Conrad," whispered Eileen in reply. "It's a chivalrous thing to do—quixotic, I daresay you will call it ; but I'm not sure it's not the best course. Even honour—as well as honesty—may sometimes prove the safest policy. Many will vote for him now who wouldn't have done if he hadn't spoken like that."

"I hope you are right," sighed Sir Conrad

But Mark was now in the thick of the University question. He knew that the views he held were unpopular

not only with his own party, but with a section of the Conservatives. But he asked for a fair hearing. Did anyone doubt that, if Home Rule were given to Ireland, one of the first measures passed would be the establishment of this University? And those who opposed Home Rule gave as one of their strongest reasons the alleged fact that the Irish could get and did get all that they wanted from the Imperial Parliament. How could they say so if Parliament refused this University, which confessedly was desired by a large majority of the Irish people? It was easy enough to win cheap applause by appealing to the worst passions of religious bigotry—to recall the old times when Romanist persecuted Protestant, and Protestant Romanist—but was this worthy of the present day? Was this a sample of modern religious tolerance? It was not a question of whether Romanism was right or wrong; it was not a question of ecclesiastical privilege: it was simply a question of principle and of equity. The first principle was that it was the duty and privilege of the parent to have his son trained in the religious views he himself held; the second principle was that the wishes of the majority of the Irish people should prevail, unless they were demonstrably dangerous to the security of the Empire. Now the Irish Romanists, rightly or wrongly, refused to send their sons to a University which was either what they called Protestant or Secular; and they desired a University of their own. They had a fair claim to desire the best secondary and university education for their sons. Where, then, was either the justice or the policy of refusing this boon to them? The opposition came simply from religious bigotry of the worst type. He could understand the deep-seated feeling of resentment of Englishmen at the political action of Rome in old time; and as a Churchman he regretted the hostility and unfriendliness of modern official Romanism to the Church of England which he loved. But these feelings would not justify him in acquiescing in an act of

injustice. He was told he was sacrificing this election, and in all probability a political career, by what his friends called quixotic madness. He believed that the English people were set upon righteousness and justice ; and to their justice he appealed. Let them show by this great act of equity that Ireland could appeal, and appeal not in vain, to the British nation ; and a step—a small step it might be, but still a step—would have been taken to bridge over the gulf of separation, produced, as he was bound to admit, by neglect and oppression and injustice on the part of England, which had divided two noble nations for so long.

Mark sat down, and for a few seconds there was a dead silence ; then the cheering was loud and tumultuous, and it was evident that the speech had been a great success. Many of the stalwarts on the platform shook their heads ; but the mass of the audience were captured by the candidate's fearlessness, and the evident trust he placed in their sense of justice and fair play. A vote of confidence was carried with enthusiasm ; and Mark was escorted to his hotel by a crowd whose vocal efforts were more strenuous than musical.

So the fight went on, and the day of election dawned. Eileen enjoyed herself immensely driving about in a carriage-and-pair, decorated with Mark's favours, from polling-booth to polling-booth.

The counting of the votes was a trying ordeal. However all things come to an end ; and, as it turned out, the appearance of Mr. Griggs turned the scale—but not in the direction he had anticipated. He attracted but few votes from Mark ; whereas all the Protestant element in the Tory party, who were disgusted by Mr. Chudleigh's support of the proposed University, deserted in a body, and voted for Griggs, who had beaten the Protestant drum with the utmost vigour. This defection settled the matter ; and Mark Stillingfleet was returned as member for Merchester by a small, but sufficient, majority.

BOOK III

THE DEFEAT

CHAPTER I

AFTER MANY DAYS

For into lonely hearts there is instilled
The longing for a love as yet unknown,
But which they fondly yearn to call their own
When swallows build.

—*Verses Wise or Otherwise.*

It was on a Sunday afternoon, somewhere about a decade after the events narrated in the last chapter, that the Secretary of State for War, walking from a lunch-party on Camden Hill to pay a call in Park Lane, met Spring face to face in Kensington Gardens. She had not come to stay—not she!—for it was the month known among the populace as “Febuary”; but she had just looked in, so that people might see how adorable she was, and might give her an invitation to come later and pay them a longer visit,—a way which Spring sometimes has in the month known among the populace as “Febuary.”

He was still comparatively young for a man, and extremely so for a Minister, not yet having passed that somewhat formidable milestone which is marked with the number forty; but he looked old for his years, having been handicapped all his life by delicate health; and the slight limp, which was apparent when he walked, added still more to the infirmity of his appearance. His fair hair was already streaked with grey; and the scholarly stoop of his shoulders detracted from his never very numerous inches, and made him appear considerably older than he

was. A slight, careworn, unimportant-looking individual, with no special strength nor comeliness to distinguish him from his fellows ; and yet, owing to the grasp of his intellect, one of the great men of the Empire !

But intellectual greatness will not always satisfy a man. It is enough in the winter days, when the gas is lit in London from morning to night, and there is no light to be seen that is not artificial ; and it is enough in the height of the season, when the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches leave no time for men and women to turn to the heart of Nature and learn of her. But there comes a time in the early Spring, when fame and fortune fail to charm, when place and power cease to satisfy,—a time when dwellers in town long to be off to the country, and when dwellers in the country long to be off to that wonderful land of blue distances which lies over the hills and far away. And it was one of these days with the Secretary for War when Spring ran against him in Kensington Gardens.

He had achieved a wonderful career—there was no doubt of that ; everything seemed to have combined to push him as quickly as possible to the top of the political ladder. Ten years ago he had entered Parliament an unknown man, with no fortune except what he was rapidly making with his brains at the Bar ; and since then the game had been in his hands. When he first came into the House his party was not in power, and he soon made a name for himself by the able and convincing way in which he opposed the Government when he thought it in the wrong. Then for a time the Parliaments were short-lived ; but, whether on the side of the Government or of the Opposition, his progress upward steadily and rapidly continued. It was not long before he was given office in a Liberal Administration ; and there he ruled with such wisdom and ability that higher office soon became his. Then the Tories came back into power, and again he so distinguished himself in

opposition that the Duke of Mershire, on his return to power, gave him a seat in the Cabinet; where again he showed such efficiency in rule as well as capacity in council that, on the death of the then Secretary for War, he was appointed by the Duke to fill that important place.

Yes, it was a wonderful career—almost unprecedented in its brilliancy and swiftness; in fact, only paralleled in late years by the rise of Sir Conrad Clayton, the present Home Secretary. Nevertheless the Secretary for War was not a happy man. He was lonely—terribly lonely; for in spite of his intellectual prowess he was one of those tender, sensitive souls, who find happiness in the love and sympathy, rather than in the fear and admiration, of their fellows. And his lameness was a bitter grief to him. He often recalled the story, told in such pathetic words, of the warrior of old, who was “great and honourable and a mighty man of valour—but he was a leper”; he felt that he himself was in a like case. What were place and power and all the successes of statecraft to him, any more than to the captain of the Syrian host, if he likewise was set apart from his fellows by the cruel and insurmountable bar of physical disease and deformity? Gladly would he have changed places with one of his own guards, who were loved of women and admired of men because of their personal strength and beauty; for although a great statesman, he was still human, and therefore—like the rest of us—enormously exaggerated the importance of the one gift which had been denied to him, allowing it to dwarf into comparative insignificance all the others with which he had been so abundantly endowed.

And perhaps in this he was less to blame than many of us are who do the very same thing. For he had loved, like most men; and, unlike most men, he had never fallen away from his first love: it was as fresh to him to-day, and as much a fundamental part of his existence, as it had been when he was little more than a boy; and it was

his lameness that had come between him and the fruition of this consuming love. Therefore was it to be wondered at that he hated his deformity with all the strength of his nature?

He had dreamed long ago of how this magic gift was going to transform his whole world for him; how the fairy-princess would touch with her wand the poor limb of which he had always been so bitterly ashamed, and would change it from a disgrace to a glory because of her pity for it and her love for him; and how, because of her comforting and cherishing, he would never be sore nor hurt nor ashamed any more. She would not despise him for being lame—she would only love him the more for it, as his mother had done, he thought to himself: women were made like that; it was in things such as this that they were so much better than men. And if she did not mind his deformity, he would not mind it either. Yes, there was balm in Gilead after all; and balm which should be all the sweeter because of the bitterness of the pain which it was sent to heal.

And then, lo! a kind-hearted, well-meaning young matron—a dear friend alike of himself and of the girl he loved—told him that this latter shrank from and despised his deformity as much as did the rest of the world—that the love of so sickly a specimen of humanity as himself would be repulsive rather than attractive to a healthy-minded woman. Whereupon the poor, brilliant young lawyer put love once for all out of his life (or rather the expression of it), and decided to cultivate fame instead; finding what cold comfort he could in the Platonic friendship of the girl who was all the world to him.

Sometimes he succeeded in persuading himself that this contented him; that the unfailing sympathy and encouragement of one of the most brilliant women in London was enough to satisfy any man. But now and again—such as on that Sunday, for instance, when Spring laughed in his face in Kensington Gardens—a passionate yearning for

something nearer and dearer than friendship filled his aching heart. Sympathy and admiration might be enough for the Secretary of State ; but the man, Mark Stillingfleet, cried out for more. He grew weary of the fine lady's cleverness ; her very brilliancy seemed to tire and dazzle him ; and he longed, with a longing that was almost unendurable, to take the woman in his arms—to bid her put aside alike her wit and her fine-ladyhood for a season, and babble into his ears such fond nonsense as only lovers use. But it was not to be, he felt : woman's love and woman's kisses were not for cripples such as he, but for the whole and handsome half of mankind ; and he must content himself with the lesser lights of fame and fortune, and extract what warmth he could from their somewhat chilly flames.

And then there were other times, besides the first days of Spring, when he realized that his satisfaction in this one woman's friendship was all a delusion and a sham—times when he heard her name coupled by the idle tongues of Society with the names of other men ; and when he longed, lame and delicate though he was, to take these other men by the throat, and crush the life out of them then and there.

Of course he could have married over and over again, had he wished it : plenty of women, and attractive women too, would have jumped at him, as he was counted one of the best matches in England. But, as it happened, Mark did not care for the jumping order of woman : lame though he might be, he wanted to make the running, and he meant to do his wooing for himself or not at all. And then he did not care merely to be married by a woman for the sake of what he could give her : he was old-fashioned in his desires, and above all things wanted to be loved for himself alone—for his deformed and outwardly unattractive self ; and as he imagined that he was not the manner of man to command the absolute devotion for

which his soul hungered, he decided to remain a bachelor to the end of his days. He knew what true love might and ought to be: he believed that such love was entirely beyond his reach; and rather than lower his ideals and content himself with the second best, he made up his mind to do without love in his life altogether, and to fill up the vacuum as best he could with such poor substitutes as place and power.

As for the woman whom he worshipped, she was in all respects worthy of his adoration. She had left off being young and silly, and had not yet begun to be old and foolish, so was in the very zenith of her charm. She was, moreover, a great lady in her way, the only child and heiress of an Irish peer of ancient lineage, who held office in the Duke of Mershire's administration; and she had considerable political influence, being regarded as no mean asset of the Liberal party when strings had to be pulled and rebellious members controlled. She knew to a turn how much to smile and on whom to bestow this favour, when to be gracious and when dignified: in fact there was very little that Miss St. Just did not know, saving the one piece of information which really concerned her—namely, why Mark Stillingfleet did not ask her to be his wife. That was a Cabinet secret which she had never succeeded in guessing, since she had no idea of the friendly part which the well-meaning Sophy had taken it upon herself to play all those years ago. She knew that Mark loved her, she knew that he had made up his mind never to marry her, and she knew that she would never marry any other man as long as she lived. But to reconcile these three conflicting statements was utterly beyond her by no means inconsiderable powers.

Yet Mrs. Bamfield had not intended to do any harm; she had intended to avoid pain and never to cause it. She might have a babbling tongue, but she undoubtedly had a kind heart; and even if she said unkind things,

she did not mean them. She was one of the people of whom their friends say that "their bark is worse than their bite"—forgetting that, as Society is constituted nowadays, far more harm is done by barking than by biting. The reign of the Bite, as one of the devil's instruments, is over: it is an antiquated tool, like the fowling-piece or the blunderbuss; but the Bark flourishes as it never flourished before, and does more deadly and successful work. And as long as otherwise excellent and God-fearing persons let off steam by saying unkind things which they do not in the least mean, and which they forget as soon as they have uttered them, the father of lies may rest content that his interests will never be allowed to lapse, and that the prayer sent up daily to heaven by his opponents, "Thy Kingdom come," will remain unanswered.

People had grown tired of wondering why Miss St. Just did not marry, and had accepted her singleness of heart as a matter of course. After all, she did not belong to a marrying generation; and she was one of the few women who have nothing to gain, from an outside point of view, from matrimony. She already had great wealth, high rank, and undoubted prestige; and the single woman who possesses these three attributes has no special reason for changing her state—except, of course, the superannuated one of falling in love with a particular man, and feeling that without him everything is worthless; but that with him earth has nothing left to offer, and heaven little to add.

The Duke of Mershire was still the head of the Liberal party, as he had been for the last thirty years; and political immortality, before death, as well as after, appeared to be his. For a long time the country had been expecting his retirement, and the installation of Sir Conrad Clayton in his place; but the Duke held on with undiminished health and strength, and seemed to grow not a day older either mentally or physically.

It was hardly to be wondered at if the Home Secretary grew weary with so long a waiting, and displayed something of the irritability of a daughter of uncertain age, who has lived too long in her parents' house after becoming ripe to rule a house of her own. For many years Sir Conrad had led the party in the House of Commons: he felt that it was time for the reward of his labours; and his wife felt this even more strongly than he. There was no doubt, unless some unforeseen political complication arose, that Sir Conrad would be the next Liberal Premier; but time was going on, and he sorely wanted to be a present Prime Minister instead of a future one—for there is no doubt that of the two it is the more satisfactory office. He had never been a pet of the Duke's as Mark Stillingfleet was: the amount of love lost between the Prime Minister and his Home Secretary was reduced to a minimum; but outwardly they had got on well enough together since their great difference of opinion on the question of the Roman Catholic University, which practically amounted to nothing, as the Tories came into power at the General Election, and the University was carried with a large majority.

There was another cloud on Sir Conrad's horizon besides the unjustifiable longevity of the Duke; namely, his superstition concerning the early death of his son. Nothing could shake him in his fixed belief that Archibald was foredoomed to predecease him; and although he never mentioned this superstition to anyone, not even to his wife, it ate into his soul and poisoned all his happiness.

At present Archie showed no signs of premature decay; he was in the prime of life, a man of unusually perfect health and vigour. But his father could not forget how frequently fate had seemed to dog his footsteps with the shadow of a violent death from which no amount of bodily strength could save him. Finding that Miss St. Just was out of his reach, the sensible Archibald wasted no

more time in hankering after grapes which, if not actually sour, were indubitably sharp and tart to the taste ; but took to wife the Lady Amy Moate, youngest daughter of the Earl of Portcullis and niece of that Lady Alicia Baxendale whose history has been told elsewhere. Lady Amy was young and pretty and good-tempered and stupid—everything that a wise man could desire in a wife ; and she bore him four beautiful children, who were as the light of Sir Conrad's eyes. But their grandfather's delight in them could not blot out his distress in the fate which so cruelly threatened their handsome and high-spirited father.

CHAPTER II

NO MERCY

But he learnt too late, when he counted the cost,
That the world was gained and the soul was lost.

—*Verses Wise or Otherwise.*

SIR CONRAD CLAYTON sat alone in his room at the Home Office with an expression of utter misery upon his face ; and the cause of this misery was that the execution of a notorious criminal, Zadkiel Lee by name, had been fixed for the following Monday.

There was nothing extraordinary about the case ; if ever a man deserved hanging, this man did. A life devoted to every kind of evil had culminated in a murder of atrocious cruelty—the murder of the man's own wife and child ; and the wretch had displayed such selfish callousness all through his sinful and sordid career, that he claimed neither mercy nor pity from his fellow men.

Nevertheless, the Home Secretary was racking his brains for some excuse to save the murderer from the extreme penalty of the law. Over and over again had the great lawyer gone through the evidence against Zadkiel Lee ; and over and over again had he been compelled to admit that there was no loophole for escape. If ever a modern instance were needed to justify capital punishment, surely here was a case to hand ; the continuance of so degraded and debased an existence could be nothing but a source of injury to the individual and of danger to the State. Lee

had been sent to gaol many a time, and had always come out again endowed with fresh zeal and energy for the performance of evil ; then why was it desirable that such a monster of wickedness should continue to live ?

As a public man Sir Conrad recognized that to spare this man's life would be a gross miscarriage of justice ; but as a private person he trembled before the possible consequences of the murderer's death. He could not fail to see that this tragedy was practically his own doing ; that if he had listened to the old preacher's entreaties, and had spared the gipsy-child from the influence of criminal companionship at so early an age, the boy would in all probability have grown up to be a respectable member of society ; and that therefore it was but just that he himself should share Lee's punishment.

And he had no doubt in his own mind what form his share in the punishment would take. It would fall upon his firstborn, as Philemon Gleave had foretold. As the Home Secretary grew older he grew more superstitious, and more imbued with the conviction that Unseen Forces were leagued together against him ; and that unless he could succeed in propitiating These, Archibald was doomed. It would have been strange, had it not been natural, that so sceptical a man should fall into superstition in his old age ; but as a rule the people who begin by believing too little, end by believing too much.

Sir Conrad felt convinced that the execution of Zadkiel Lee would hasten the death of Archie ; that when his crime had worked itself out to its logical conclusion, his punishment would fall ; and therefore he strove, though in vain, to find some excuse for sparing the life of the convicted gipsy.

While he thus sat wrapped in gloomy meditation, Mark Stillingfleet was announced.

"Good morning," said Sir Conrad, rising to receive his visitor and shaking him by the hand. "Have you

gone through all the papers which I asked you to look over in a strictly private and friendly capacity?"

"I have," replied Mark, taking a seat; "and I am bound to say that I never came across the history of a more revolting and squalid crime. Frequently even the worst criminals have some sort of dignity about them—something which lends a kind of brutal heroism to their misdeeds; but this wretch seems to have had not a single redeeming point in his whole character and conduct."

"Then you think that a recommendation to mercy would be out of the question?"

"I cannot presume to advise you as a Minister; but if you ask me as a man I should say it would be perfectly absurd. On what grounds could such a cowardly villain lay claim to mercy, or even to pity? The man was evidently bad to the core, and utterly vitiated; and I should say that his death would be a boon to society at large."

The Home Secretary sighed. If two such astute lawyers could not find a loophole for Zadkiel Lee, there was evidently no loophole to be found.

"I cannot make out why you have troubled yourself about the case at all," Mark continued: "the wretch is so utterly vile as to be lost to all sense of his own sin; he is not even sorry for what he has done, but rather glories in it. I certainly don't believe that you could find a man in the whole of the criminal classes who more obviously was born to be hanged."

"He was not born like that; it was I who made him so."

Stillingfleet raised his eyebrows in amazement.

"You, Sir Conrad? What on earth had you to do with the making of such a miscreant as this?"

"I sent him to prison for stealing a hare when he was a child, and he has gone to the bad ever since."

"Still, I daresay the little thief deserved it, even in those days."

"I don't believe that he did. He was a very little boy—only about eight or ten—a wandering gipsy-child."

"But I suppose that you had had a good deal of trouble with him before?"

"No, it was his first offence, as far as I knew."

"Do you mean to say that you sent a child of only eight years old to gaol for a first offence, and that only the stealing of a hare or so? It was a bit hard on him, don't you think?"

Sir Conrad did not attempt to spare himself.

"He had snared one hare, that was all; and I was not absolutely sure of that. But I found him beside the warm body of the creature, and concluded that he was the thief."

"But surely the poor little fellow was not convicted on that evidence?"

"It was only a magistrates' conviction, you see, and magistrates were not particularly fussy in those days. They took my word for it that the boy was a poacher—as I believed, and still believe, he was—and sent him to gaol on that."

Mark's face grew stern.

"And did no one point out to you how severely you were dealing with the boy, nor how terrible might be the consequences of consigning him to the company of gaol birds at that tender and impressionable age?"

"Yes, his mother pleaded for him on her knees, and a ranting old preacher swore to me that if the boy's soul were lost, as he called it, it would all be my doing; and he went to the length of saying that his God would punish me for the same."

"And even then you did it? It was not like you, Sir Conrad,—you who are generally so immovably just."

"Even then I did it."

There was a pause, during which the Home Secretary watched the face of his colleague curiously. He had always

slightly despised Mark, in spite of the latter's undoubted ability, for what he considered the younger man's sentimental idealism ; but there was not much sentimentality in his expression just now. Sir Conrad began to understand what other men meant when they said they were afraid of Stillingfleet.

Then Mark said :

" I see ; it is because you feel you are responsible for this man's crime that you wish to save him from the consequences of it ? "

" Well, don't you think that I am in a measure responsible for it ? "

" I fear you are to a certain extent. "

" And that therefore I ought to do what I can to save him ? "

" Yes, but not what you can't. "

" Then don't you think it is possible to commute the man's sentence to penal servitude for life, Stillingfleet ? "

" I am afraid it would be considered an act of flagrant injustice. "

" But the man himself—the man who, according to the phraseology of you pious people, is not fit to die—what about him ? "

" Ah ! that is where the tragedy comes in, " replied Mark sorrowfully.

" But you own that you think I am responsible for his career ? "

" I am afraid that we cannot altogether get away from that. "

" Then is it just that he should be punished ? "

" It is ; because he also is responsible for his own sins. No man is tempted above what he is able to bear ; and the fact that other people are to some extent responsible for our evil doings, in no way lessens our own responsibility. "

" And is it just that I should escape altogether, while he suffers the extreme penalty of the law ? "

Mark looked very grave.

"I don't think you will escape altogether."

Sir Conrad felt as if he had received a blow, and he pulled himself together by a sneer.

"I thought you religious people believed in the forgiveness of sins?"

"So we do: by which we mean the remission of guilt, but not the removal of consequences. We still believe that whatsoever a man sows that shall he reap; and that therefore it behoves him to be careful in the sowing."

"By Jove, Stillingfleet, I didn't think you had it in you to be so hard! Have you no pity for that poor wretch who is to be hanged by the neck till he is dead?"

"My pity was all expended upon the innocent wife and child whom he so foully and cruelly murdered."

"And his death fills you with no horror?" the Home Secretary persisted.

"No, truthfully I cannot say that it does; as a matter of fact, I think it is the best thing that could happen to him. You see I believe in a life beyond the grave. I also believe in the absolute justice of God; therefore if, as you say, the man, owing to your harshness towards him, never had a fair chance here, I believe that God will give him a fair chance somewhere else, unhampered this time by any person's influence or interference. Death is not an irremediable catastrophe; there are far worse things than death."

"And do you think I shall have another chance, too, in this educational Hades of your imagination?"

Mark was silent for a moment; then he said:

"I don't know; what should you say yourself? As a man who has always been noted for his fairness in debate, tell me honestly, Sir Conrad, do you think that you really deserve another chance?"

Sir Conrad rose from his chair, and towered above his younger and slighter colleague.

"As a just man, Stillingfleet, I cannot honestly say that I do. I took my own course—I defied any Power outside of and greater than myself—and it is but fair that I should bear the consequences of my own actions."

Mark rose also.

"I am afraid I must agree with you, though it goes sorely against the grain to do so. Do you know a game which children play at, called 'Consequences'? Well, that is a game which we are compelled to play all our lives—and afterwards; there is no getting away from that game, however hard we may try—worse luck for us!"

"And the blood of that miserable young man is, and must be, upon my head," groaned the Home Secretary, after his colleague had left the room and he was alone once more. He knew, with a conviction which was never afterwards shaken, that as he had made his bed so must he lie on it—that the prophecy of Philemon Gleave would, and must be, fulfilled to the letter. The tragic end of Zadkiel Lee was as the sign and seal of his own condemnation—the token that the God of Philemon Gleave had accepted his challenge, and would carry out the warfare against him to the bitter end.

However much he might formerly have tricked himself into believing that he could bribe immutable Justice, he knew now that in this imagining he had proved himself mistaken, and that, come what might, his sentence was pronounced and his doom written. He had heaped up riches, but his firstborn would never gather them; he had made a great name for himself, but his firstborn would not bear it after him. As the old preacher had foretold, so it must be accomplished; and so indeed in the fulness of time it came to pass.

Zadkiel Lee was hanged by the neck till he was dead on the following Monday; and on the Thursday night after that the Government was beaten. Sir Conrad connected the two events in his own mind as cause and effect;

but no one else in the Empire saw the slightest connection between them.

True, the Liberals were only defeated by a very small majority ; but they were beaten, and on a Government question, so the Duke of Mershire had no alternative but to resign.

The Conservative leader consented to take office without an appeal to the country until the end of the Session. But it was not likely that the Tories could hold on for long with an actual minority in the House of Commons, although it was to the interests of the Liberals that they should do so for the present.

Sir Conrad felt the thrill of battle tingling through every nerve. He would beat the Tory leaders yet, he said to himself, and come in again with a rattling majority ; but until then he would lie low, and leave the Conservatives to make such mistakes as he considered salutary and educational to the country at large. Sir Conrad was nothing if not an opportunist.

With regard to that other Power Which he was fighting against—more intangible and far more powerful than the Conservative party—he did not feel so sure of success. There were no mistakes in the policy of that Government—no errors of judgment which could be turned to good effect by the other side ; nothing but a merciless and resistless Force, Which pursued Its course with all the certainty of an immutable law, and Which crushed to powder any who dared to stand in Its way. Nevertheless, Conrad Clayton drew his breath and set his shoulders and dared the Unknown God Whom he had defied, to do His worst. His own sins might be visited on his own head, Conrad said to himself ; but anyway he would meet his punishment without flinching. Sir Conrad was nothing if not a man.

CHAPTER III

THE GREAT FEDERATION

England woke at last like a giant from her slumbers,
And she turned to swords her ploughshares, and her pruning hooks
to spears,

While she called her sons and bade them
Be the men that God had made them
Ere they fell away from manhood in the careless, idle years.

—*Love's Argument.*

MARK STILLINGFLEET rang the bell of a handsome house in Park Lane; and was duly admitted into the presence of a distinguished-looking woman some few years his junior.

"Here you are at last," she said, with a bright smile of welcome; "I thought you were never coming."

"But you knew that I was. At least you knew that you said I might, and that the two things are synonymous."

"Well, I know that Christmas is coming, and I have said that it may as far as I am concerned; but that doesn't mean that I expect it this afternoon. Although as time goes on it goes so fast, that when once January is over, the next Christmas may be upon you any minute."

"I am a person, you see, and not a date; that makes all the difference. In this case it is the man that has come, and not the hour."

"Talking of dates," said Eileen, "I have heard that the Duke has asked you to spend Easter at Merchester Towers. Are you going?"

"No, I can't."

"Why not?"

"Another engagement."

"Where?"

"At my mother's, at Silverhampton. I always spend the great festivals with her."

Eileen stretched out both her hands palm upwards, a habit she had when anything pleased her.

"Oh, how nice of you to go to her rather than to Merchester Towers! After all, mothers ought to take precedence of dukes."

"Naturally; they are an earlier creation."

"Now I want you to tell me what on earth the dear Duke is up to, and what his little game about this Federation business means," said Miss St. Just, as she handed her guest his tea. "Father and mother are playing at Darby and Joan in the Park for an hour, so I've time to give my attention to you and the country."

"As you will have seen in the papers——" Mark began.

"But I haven't. I never see the papers. I try to make history, not to read it."

"I thought that romance rather than history was of your manufacture."

"Precisely; and that's all you can get in the papers nowadays."

"You are not sufficiently respectful to the Press, Miss St. Just."

"Yes I am; I'm flattering it. A creator is ever a greater artist than a mere repeater. But we are wandering from the Duke."

"Who is one of the greatest living creators," added Mark.

"I know that, and I want you to tell me what the dear old thing is creating now."

"As a matter of fact, it is not creation, but preservation, that is at present occupying the ducal attention."

"Well, what is he preserving—strawberry-leaves or current

expenditure? Either sounds as if it would make a tasty preserve, doesn't it?"

Mark sipped his tea.

"He is preserving the British Empire," he replied quietly.

"That's a large order; but it's worth preserving, all the same."

"So I think; but some of my colleagues on the Front Opposition Bench don't agree with me."

"I know that; the excellent Sir Conrad, for instance. He is always in favour of serving the British Empire as a hash rather than as a preserve. *L'Empire Britannique à la petite Angleterre* is the dainty dish which he would prepare to set before the king—a hash indeed, for all its fine name!"

"Pardon me, I should call it a *pièce de résistance*; and the Premier and I are of those who resist."

Eileen laughed merrily.

"Of a truth, Master Stillingfleet, you have a pretty wit! But tell me about the Duke's simple for empire-preserving; it must be a valuable recipe."

"It is; and almost a lost art. I myself am not an admirer of the modern custom of handing round empires in portions as if they were sweetbreads; I prefer the old-fashioned way of serving them up whole, like joints."

"So that you can cut and come again?"

"No: so that you can cut and run away."

"But about this idea of the Duke's, which everybody is explaining and nobody understands?"

Mark's face grew serious.

"I cannot go into all the details now: in fact it is as yet doubtful what will be the best means for gaining the end in view. These must be discussed step by step. But, roughly speaking, it is this: that England and all her Colonies shall form one great Federation, one vast alliance offensive and defensive, and so shall defy and rule the world. That, in a nutshell, is the Duke's proposition."

"It is a grand idea!" exclaimed Eileen with sparkling eyes.

"It is; an idea worthy of a man who has so nobly and ably ruled in this world that he is now ready and worthy to serve in the next."

"Then why do Sir Conrad Clayton and his following object?"

"Oh! they say it is against the principles of peace—and of economy; and peace (without plenty) is their watchword."

"Peace at any price, I suppose?"

"Yes, but the smaller the price the better they are pleased. I am for peace, too, but not peace at any price; I am for a peace based on a solid and lasting foundation—not a shoddy peace made up of pocketed pride and swallowed insults. In the same way I am in favour of commercial prosperity—but not for a fictitious prosperity built up by one class of the community at the expense of the others—a general robbing of Peter for the paying of Paul. Peace and prosperity such as these are only euphemisms for selfishness and cowardice."

The woman's clever face showed her sympathy with the man beside her.

"But that is what Sir Conrad wants," she said scornfully.

"It is what Sir Conrad thinks the constituencies want; and there I think Sir Conrad is mistaken. But what does it matter whether he is mistaken or not? I hold that rulers ought to do what is right, and not merely what is politic and popular. A Government worthy the name ought to have the courage to take the right course whether the constituencies approve or whether they do not approve. But that is where Clayton and I differ."

"He would kow-tow to popular opinion, I suppose?"

"He would stoop in order to conquer—he would compromise in order to command: which is politics rather than statesmanship. But I go deeper than this. I hold that a statesman ought to do what is right,

irrespective of whether it is popular or not: but I also believe that the two are not in opposition; and that, as a rule, the people would prefer the right course if only things were made clear to them and they were allowed, with their eyes open, to choose for themselves."

"So do I, Mr. Stillingfleet."

"I believe that both in public and in private life if you appeal to the best in people rather than to the worst—if you call to their higher natures rather than to their lower—they will respond. I do not agree with Clayton that the commercial spirit has swallowed up the patriotic spirit in England; I believe that England is as patriotic and large-hearted—as English in fact—as she ever was; and that if you call to the great heart of the great English nation, you will never call in vain!"

Once more Eileen looked the sympathy and acquiescence which she did not speak. She was a clever woman, and had, moreover, made the most of her opportunities of becoming still cleverer. For nearly twenty years she had known how to talk well when a man wanted to listen; but during the last ten she had, in addition, mastered the sublimer art of listening well when a man wanted to talk. From a social point of view she had not now much to learn.

"If you carefully read the Old Testament," continued Mark, "you will learn a good many useful lessons as to the government of men and the ruling of the nations; and there you will see that as long as the people feared God and kept His Commandments, they prospered; while as soon as they forsook Him and worshipped strange gods, the nation fell into decay. It is an old-fashioned prescription for national prosperity, I admit; but I believe it is the only effectual one."

"The truth must always be old-fashioned; since it has no end, neither had it any beginning."

"Did you ever notice what is called a skeleton-clock?" Mark went on.

"Oh, yes! I know them well. Things whose insides are outside, and which have got no outsides at all."

"They are really the same as other clocks, only we can watch the working of their wheels, while the working of the others we have to take upon trust. Well, it seems to me that the Old Testament is a political skeleton-clock. God rules over all the nations alike; but in His government of Israel we are allowed to see the works for ourselves, while in the others we have to take them on trust."

"I know exactly what you mean."

"We cannot always understand this and that, and the why and wherefore of it all. We only know that the way in which Israel was governed was God's way, and that what we do not know now we shall know hereafter; and that ought to be enough for us."

"Just as in the clocks we don't exactly know why the wheels go round: we only know that they do, and that the clock would stop if they didn't."

"Precisely."

"Certainly peace at any price was not the policy of the Jews," said Eileen thoughtfully.

"It was not, neither was prosperity at any price; but righteousness at any price was; and whenever the nation fell away from this, it fell into disgrace. I grant you that war is one of the worst things on earth, and so is disease. They were both brought into the world by sin, and will both be destroyed when sin is finally conquered. Nevertheless men can buy peace and health and even life itself too dear."

"But not righteousness," added Eileen softly. "The life of the Christ Himself was not too big a price to pay for that."

Mark's face grew tender, as it always did when the woman he loved spoke about the deeper things of life.

"No, you are right there. War and pain and sorrow, and even death itself, are only symptoms: sin is really the

disease. It is no use trying to cure the symptoms while the disease remains : any doctor will tell you that ; but when the disease is cured, the symptoms will disappear of themselves."

"Thus peace at any price—peace purchased by national dishonour or commercial selfishness or political insincerity—is merely a narcotic, not a remedy at all?"

"It is, and a very dangerous narcotic, too ; for it serves to lull the superficial pain which is sent by Nature as a warning of the underlying malady ; and so it blinds the sufferer and his attendants to the true state of the case. Understand me, I pray for peace as for one of the best of God's good gifts : I should be no true patriot if I did not ; but it must be a lasting peace, established upon a foundation of truth and righteousness, and not a fictitious tranquillity erected upon a tissue of insincere adaptation."

"To return to your skeleton-clock," remarked Miss St. Just. "It certainly appeared to lead to peace, of a sort, when the Jews tried to make things pleasant by showing politeness to Baal and the like ; but it did not prove a permanently successful policy."

"No ; compromise and expediency never succeeded in my skeleton-clock, as you say. For instance, Jeroboam's idea of making two golden calves and setting them up in Bethel and Dan, in order to prevent the people from going up to Jerusalem and so becoming estranged from their existing rulers, was admirable from a political point of view."

"It was exactly what Sir Conrad would have done in the circumstances, wasn't it?"

"Precisely. I can imagine the very speech he would have made when he laid the suggestion before the House of Commons. He would first have shown what a serious thing it would be for the kingdom once more to be united as a whole. Large empires, as you know, always give the Home Secretary the nightmare."

Eileen laughed, saying ;

"And then he would have pointed out what an excellent thing it would be for the ratepayers of Dan and Bethel if the people went there to sacrifice instead of to Jerusalem—by which speech, he would congratulate himself, he should secure those constituencies at the next General Election. And he would be laughing in his sleeve at the voters in Dan and Bethel all the time, and thinking how cleverly he had managed them."

"Yes, it all seems very plausible and very clever. Nevertheless it is written that this thing became a sin."

"As it always becomes a sin, Mr. Stillingfleet, when men put secondary considerations before first ones. But the Duke is not like Sir Conrad."

"No, no, the Duke is made of very different material. Clayton despises him as a visionary and an idealist ; but for my part I would rather put my trust in the so-called foolishness of His Grace than in the wisdom of such politicians as Sir Conrad."

"Then is the Duke going to lay this motion before the House at once ?" asked Eileen ; "or, rather—as he isn't in the House of Commons, poor dear !—is he going to commission you, his chief bridesmaid, to do so ?"

"He is going to commission me to do so at a very early date ; and I am immensely proud of being selected by him for the job."

"And then there must be a Dissolution ?"

"Then, as you say, Miss St. Just, there must be a Dissolution."

"And do you think the country will be with him ?"

"I do ; because I think the country at heart is always in favour of the highest and noblest course, if only statesmen have the courage to put that course plainly before it, instead of trying to cajole and flatter it for party purposes."

"Then you expect the Liberals to come back into power ?"

"No, I don't. I think that Sir Conrad Clayton and his friends will so succeed in splitting up the Liberal party that the Conservatives will have a walk-over. It is a noteworthy fact that a Liberal is always far more bitter against another Liberal who disagrees with him upon one point, than against a Tory who disagrees with him upon all : which accounts for the remarkable longevity of Tory Governments."

"Yet you believe that Liberalism is the policy of the future?"

"I do," replied Mark ; "I think that just now Toryism is too old and Liberalism too young—that the country is like a man who is torn between an antiquated and senile old mother and an excitable and inexperienced young wife. But I believe that if a great Liberal Imperialist party grew up—putting aside its fads and its crotchets, and combining the patriotism and chivalry and courage of a bygone age with the energy and vigour and creativeness of the present one—that party would rule England, and would enable England to rule the world."

CHAPTER IV

TETLEIGH TOWERS

Ye tell us that spring is a hastening comer—
That winter is past and his passion is spent—
That glory and gladness will dawn with the summer ;
But ye will not live for it, Lilies of Lent.

—*Love's Argument.*

ABOUT two miles to the west of Silverhampton stood Teteigh Towers, the country seat of Sir Conrad Clayton. The house was one of those fascinating edifices which, after the manner of the immortal Topsy, had not been built but had "grewed"; a large, delightful, rambling mansion, full of charming surprises, where nothing existed save the unexpected. There was an ideal country drawing-room on one side of the hall—a long, low, sunny room, made still sunnier by plentiful white paint and a pale blue carpet and curtains; and an ideal dining-room on the other side—a room of mysterious nooks and corners, rendered still more mysterious by furniture and panellings of finely carved black oak; and then where the house ought to have ended, according to all laws of domestic architecture—where, in fact, any house would have ended that had a spark of conventionality in its composition—there came a conservatory of orange-trees and marble fountains, leading into the finest ballroom in all Mershire, with two galleries running round it, and a huge chimney-corner big enough to roast an ox; and beyond that came billiard-rooms and

smoking-rooms and gun-rooms galore. Certainly there never was such a house for surprises as Teteleigh Towers !

It was on the afternoon of Easter Monday that the Home Secretary and his house-party were having tea under an old acacia-tree in the middle of the lawn. It was a lovely day ; one of those wonderful April days when Spring pretends for a little that she is a grown-up woman instead of a fickle girl, and assumes for the nonce all the maturer airs and graces of Summer. The woods at the end of the lawn were ablaze with daffodils, dancing and making merry in the soft west wind ; and the garden was so gay with the bright blue scilla, which flourishes abundantly in that part of Mershire, that it seemed as if the angels of the Resurrection had left some patches of heaven behind them when they visited the earth on Easter Day.

On the other side of the valley Silverhampton lay asleep in the afternoon sunshine. Because it was a holiday and because the wind was in the west, there was hardly any smoke in the air ; and so the tower of S. Peter's Church stood out on the crest of the hill against the blue sky with clear and unblurred outlines. Further along the ridge came Sedgemoor Church and Sedgemoor Beacon, likewise pointing heavenwards—as indeed all things point at Eastertide, be they grey church towers or flowers of the field.

Earth has many roads trodden by the feet of many pilgrims, but her finger-posts all point the same way—the way to heaven. Yet though all earth's roads have the same end, they have not the same beginning ; and therefore appear, to the casual observer, to lead in different directions. The wise men from the east and the wise men from the west must turn their faces in precisely opposite ways if they wish finally to meet in the centre : it is not enough to say, " Brother, whither goest thou ? " but also, " Brother, whence comest thou ? " before we tell a wayfaring man that he is not journeying by the right

road. Wherefore let men and women take heed how they meddle with their neighbours' sign-posts ! Also let men and women listen to such lessons as Nature teaches, and learn of her ! For a knowledge of Nature is one of the best trainings for the receiving of Revelation. Be it remembered that it was not to crowned kings going forth to conquer—nor to learned scholars studying ancient lore—nor even to anointed priests interceding for the people in the house of prayer—that the greatest of all Messages was first delivered ; but to shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flocks by night.

“By the way, Eileen, shall you hunt to-morrow?” asked Archie Clayton of his charming fellow-guest.

“Of course I shall ; it's what I have come down into Mershire for—with the society of the Clayton family thrown in as a make-weight. No, I don't mean a make-weight ; that sounds as if you were all rather heavy, which, even if you are, it isn't my place to say so, while I'm eating your salt, or rather your sugar, in my tea at the present moment.”

“I am glad to find that you regard the laws of hospitality as sacred,” said Sir Conrad with a smile.

“Oh ! I don't regard them as sacred altogether ; but I make a rule of always keeping a law unless anything can be gained by breaking it : it is a safe rule, and keeps one out of hot water on the one side and gaol on the other.”

“A happy mean !” remarked the host ; “and I fancy you follow pretty much the same policy with regard to hearts—keep them indefinitely, unless anything can be gained by breaking them.”

Archie burst into a loud guffaw.

“Well aimed, guv'nor ! You've got your arrow into the gold this time, and no mistake.”

“Not he !” retorted Eileen ; “he's just in the edge of the red, and not a shade nearer the mark than that.

Because, as a matter of fact, I can't keep hearts as easily as I can keep laws : I only wish I could ; but they are so apt to slip out of one's fingers into somebody else's when one isn't looking."

"Mine played you that trick if you remember. You let your attention wander from it for a bit, having bigger game on hand, and then somehow it dropped out of your clutches and pitched right into Amy's."

"You fell on your feet that time, my boy," remarked Sir Conrad.

"Or rather," said Eileen, "he fell on his knees, and besought Amy carefully to guard the wandering organ."

"And I've taken great care of it ever since, haven't I, darling?" interrupted Archie's wife.

"By Jove, I should just think you have—more care than I altogether fancy at times ! It makes a chap feel a bit tied when his wife looks after him as deuced well as you do."

"I daresay it does," said Eileen sympathetically ; "you must feel like a captive balloon, or a donkey on a common, or the sea when Canute took to giving orders from the shore. That's why I don't marry—in order to avoid the cramped feeling of which you, dear Archie, so pathetically complain."

"And you've the right of it there ; for you'd never stand any chap giving you orders. 'Pon my soul, I'd like to see a fellow try !"

"Yes, it would be a pretty and instructive sight. Now as it is, you see, I feel like André's balloon and a wild ass and a marine earthquake rolled into one ; nobody can order me about, because it isn't in anybody's department to do so."

"Still somebody might be found brave enough to undertake the office," Sir Conrad suggested.

"Then they'd have to be sworn in on purpose, like special constables at elections ; and what's the good, when,

as I've told you, I am a law-abiding person on my own account? I don't want to drink beer at public-houses after closing-time, nor to evade the death-duties, nor to marry my deceased wife's sister; so what on earth is the good of appointing a husband to keep me from doing these wicked things? His office would be a sinecure."

"Hardly that," responded Sir Conrad drily.

"And then," Eileen continued, "married women are always fussing about things that don't in the least matter, such as servants, dinners, and the like. I am sure that getting married would make an old maid of me! Besides, I hate changes of any kind. A change is always sad, even when it isn't."

"It is always better for a woman to marry," said Gregory Bamfield dogmatically, "and to marry early; otherwise she becomes a nuisance to her family and a bore to society at large. For my part, I do not approve of single women."

"Yet you married one," suggested Miss St. Just.

"I did; but you will admit she was young——"

"And obviously foolish," murmured Eileen under her breath.

"And therefore I had the moulding of her."

The verb "to mould" was a very popular one in the Bamfield family.

"The moulding of her indeed!" exclaimed Miss St. Just; "you talk as if women were made of blanc-mange."

"Oh, yes!" said Mrs. Bamfield, loyally supporting her lord and master, "married life is much the happier state for a woman. If the man lives, she has company all her life; and if he doesn't, she has still his money and position; and the position of a married woman is always so much nicer and more important than that of a single one, I think."

"There are marriages and marriages," growled her husband, who was not going to be propitiated as easily as

this. "It is ridiculous, Sophia, to advocate marriage in that indiscriminate and wholesale fashion. I wonder that at your age you have not more sense."

"Well, Gregory dear, whatever you may say of a woman, it is always nice for a man to be married, don't you think? It seems to me so wretched for bachelors when they are ill; it must be so chilly to have all your mustard-leaves and poultices and things put on by servants."

"Not at all, Sophia. As a rule it is far more comfortable in illness to be waited upon by hired attendants than to have your wife fussing round and asking you every five seconds if you are better. I hate fuss!"

"I agree with Sophy that it is as a rule better for a woman to marry," said Sophy's father; "though marriage is not necessarily that entirely blissful state which single women imagine it to be. In marriage, as in politics, one can only expect the second best—not the ideally perfect."

"I notice," murmured Eileen, "that many men appear to like their Second best."

"Because," snarled Gregory, "she is generally a complete contrast to their First."

In spite of her husband's irritability, the amiable Sophy pursued the even tenor of her conversational way.

"I think it is such a pity that Mark doesn't marry. Even though he is so plain and lame, there are hundreds of nice girls who would be quite pleased to marry a man in his position; and, being so sickly and delicate, he ought to have some woman to look after him, I am sure."

"He has his mother," Lady Amy suggested.

"But she doesn't live with him," persisted Sophy; "and if he is ill in London she can't see to him when she is down here."

"Certainly," added Eileen, "when one is seedy, a wife in the hand is worth two mothers in the bush; and Mr. Stillingfleet's mother seems especially far-fetched. It must be

tiresome to have a sort of absentee landlord for a mother, as he has ; I wonder he doesn't have her to live with him."

"He very much wished it at one time," Lady Clayton explained, "but she felt that the change would be too much for her—as indeed it would, for she was too delicate to alter her whole manner of life ; it would have killed her in a year."

"He is devoted to his mother," said Miss St. Just ; "it is delightful to hear him speak of her. The moment he mentions her name his eyes go quite shiny, as if the electric light had been turned on inside. I love to see men shimmer and glimmer like that over their mothers."

"She has been a wonderfully good mother to him," replied Lady Clayton ; "if it had not been for her absolute devotion and unremitting care, he would never have lived ; for he was the most delicate and miserable little baby I ever saw."

"He was a wretched little beggar in those days," said her husband ; "it used to turn me quite sick sometimes to see him, poor little chap !"

"Oh, how sad ! and how sweet of Mrs. Stillingfleet to be so devoted to him !" exclaimed Lady Amy. "I do love to see mothers wrapped up in their children !"

"Then, my dear girl," suggested Archie, "why the dickens don't you follow the good old soul's example ? Take more care of your children and less of your husband : that's a piece of advice from one who knows."

"To my mind," remarked Mr. Bamfield, "there is no more objectionable sight than a woman sacrificing her husband's interests to those of her children."

"Of course there isn't, Gregory dear," said his wife : "a woman should always put her husband before her children."

"But, my dear Sophia, that is no excuse for neglecting the duties of a mother, as so many otherwise excellent wives seem to think. To my mind there is no more distressing proof of the decadence of modern society than the light

way in which certain women (of whom I regret to say you are one) apparently regard their duty towards their offspring."

Here Sir Conrad interposed.

"If Stillingfleet had a wife she would look after more than his physical interests; she would dissuade him from pursuing his suicidal policy of supporting the Duke in this absurd Federation scheme—surely the most Utopian programme that a Liberal leader ever conceived!"

"I always wonder," said Lady Amy, "why married women are expected to be so wise, when single ones are considered to be so silly; because, after all, they are the same people."

"But wearing their rue with a difference," added Eileen.

"I must admit," said the Home Secretary, "that, considering how silly girls are, and how sensible as a rule wives are, it is the most wonderful thing in the world how the one should grow into the other."

Miss St. Just corrected him.

"No, there is still one thing more wonderful, and that is how footmen grow into butlers. If you will study the subject, you will find that the two orders of beings are racially different; they have not even the same sort of faces nor the same sort of voices. What is sauce in the footman is by no means sauce in the butler, but the dignity of office; and what is the butler's meat (or rather drink) is the footman's poison. Nevertheless, they are expected to grow into one another; and they can and do. And you will find that the more typically footmanly has been the footman, the more ideally butleresque a butler he will become. Compared with this marvel, the foolish-girl and wise-wife miracle grows stale and commonplace."

Lady Clayton looked much amused.

"You are quite right, my dear, and you have a most entertaining and original way of putting things."

"Yes," said Sir Conrad, returning to a subject which

never fails to fascinate the normal man—namely, the mistakes of a colleague,—“a wife would certainly have been useful in keeping Stillingfleet out of his present, and to my mind fatal, error of policy.”

“But suppose she had agreed with him?” suggested Miss St. Just: “wives sometimes do.”

The Home Secretary shook his head.

“No; any sensible woman would have seen that this high-flown falutin’ would never go down with the constituencies.”

“But why assume that Mr. Stillingfleet’s wife would have been a sensible woman? According to your opinion of the late Secretary for War, isn’t it a contradiction in terms?”

“Certainly not, my dear Eileen; no woman is sensible at all times, and the exception generally takes place with regard to her marriage. Besides, as we have just proved, as manners make the man, so marriage makes the woman, and she is usually sensible after marriage, if not before.”

“I wonder,” continued Eileen thoughtfully, “if in teaching a woman to be wise, a husband acts as an example or a warning?”

“It depends upon what sort of a Johnnie she has hit upon,” Archie lucidly explained.

Eileen looked round at the three married women with a charming air of inquiry.

“I notice that a husband takes up a good deal of time; and I also wonder whether he should be regarded as a profession or a recreation.”

“I don’t know,” laughed little Lady Amy. “How should you regard him if you’d got one yourself, Eileen?”

Miss St. Just considered for a moment.

“I don’t think as either a profession or a recreation, but rather as a hobby: that seems to me the ideal state of things.”

"And should you expect the old boy to regard you as a hobby, too?" asked Archie.

"Certainly not; I should expect him to regard me as a government with a strong majority and a weak policy; and to cajole and caution me accordingly."

"You will find married life very different from what you imagine," interrupted Gregory; "no man would have the time and patience to fuss round with his own wife, as you seem to expect. I know I shouldn't."

"But you won't be there," and Eileen's smile was suspiciously sweet. "The man who is there will have a most delightful time, for life with me will be like continual reading of the *Dolly Dialogues* or a bound volume of *Punch*. When he does see my jokes, *he'll* be immensely amused; and when he doesn't see my jokes, *I* shall be immensely amused; and so everybody will be pleased all round; and life will be all beer, and the rest skittles."

"Should you object to your husband's marrying again if anything happened to you?" asked Sophy, who always endeavoured to master in detail every subject brought forward during casual conversation.

"Certainly not; but *he* would. He'd find any other woman most dreadfully dull after me."

"Why do you think that Mark is making such a mistake in identifying himself with the Duke of Mershire?" asked Lady Clayton.

"Because, in the first place, it is always a mistake for a young politician to identify himself with an old one," her husband replied.

"On the principle that rats invariably leave a sinking ship?" said Eileen.

"I wouldn't put it as coarsely as that; still, no one would take a passage in a ship that was too old ever to leave the docks again. And, in the second place, unpractical sentimentality will never go down with the British public; and if a man wants to be a political

success, he must pipe such tunes as the people wish to dance to."

"And you don't think that *God save the King* is the tune that they are yearning for at present?"

"No, my dear Eileen, I do not. The only safe road to people's hearts is through their pockets; and *God save the King* is a tune for which those who pay the piper sometimes have to pay rather heavily."

Miss St. Just shrugged her shoulders.

"You think that they would therefore prefer *Home Sweet Home*, with a special accent on 'Be it never so humble'?"

"I do. You see, an heroic policy is never an economical one: the larger our Empire, the heavier our responsibility and the greater our expenditure."

"In short, Sir Conrad, you would go in for a small Empire in order to save trouble and expense?"

"Roughly speaking, yes."

"On the same principle that old ladies of the feebler sort give up keeping a carriage because they are so afraid of their coachman; and drive about in cabs?"

Miss St. Just was in an uncompromising mood.

"When I adopt your words 'trouble and expense,' I am using them in a very broad sense," explained Sir Conrad; "they cover wars and rumours of wars, and many other unpleasant things."

"I don't like wars," said Mrs. Bamfield; "they always send up the income-tax so frightfully."

"By Jove, that's our Sophy to a T!" exclaimed Archie; "she always runs her head against some petty little detail, and lets the real big concern go by. Trust her for getting hold of the wrong end of the stick if she can!"

"Not the wrong end of the stick," Eileen added, "but some little twig that has nothing to do with the real stick at all. Sophy is the sort of person who would say she could not bear an earthquake because it might make her late for lunch."

"Well, so it would," agreed Sophy, with her usual amiability, joining heartily in the laugh against herself.

Then her husband took up his parable.

"It is a great mistake, Sophia, to talk about things of which you know nothing ; and invariably ; as in the present instance, causes you to appear in a ridiculous light."

"But, Gregory dear, there are so few things that I do know anything about ; and if I only talked of those, I should never talk at all, and that would be most dreadfully dull for me."

Eileen clapped her hands.

"Bravo, Sophy ! it is very clever to know what you don't know—I'm not sure that there is anything cleverer. When you've learnt how little you've learnt, you've learnt pretty much all there is to learn : at least, so Sir Isaac Newton remarked, or words to that effect."

"I totally fail to grasp your meaning," said Gregory with some asperity.

"Probably," replied Eileen, with her most engaging smile, "it never was a sphere of knowledge specially patronized by you."

"Still," persisted Mr. Bamfield, "I know what I do know ; and that is something, you will admit."

"But not half enough," retorted the irrepressible Eileen. "Still, you don't hesitate to talk about the other things ; that's a comfort ; because if you did, as Sophy would say, it would be dreadfully dull for you."

"I am sorry you think that Mark is spoiling his career," Lady Clayton said, turning to her husband, "because he has been so wonderfully successful up to now."

"My dear Griselda, no man can expect to succeed permanently who puts the ideal before the real—the visionary before the practical."

"In short, who considers that the life is more than meat, or the body than raiment ?" added Eileen.

Sir Conrad felt distinctly irritated.

"You put things far too crudely."

"Did you say 'crudely' or 'rudely'?" inquired the culprit.

"I said the one, but I meant the other."

Miss St. Just clasped her hands as if in admiration.

"How truly statesmanlike!" she murmured under her breath.

"Politics," continued Sir Conrad, "are the science of compromise—the art of dealing with men not as they ought to be, but as they are. Now that is where Stillingfleet makes a mistake: he never deals with men as they are."

"And so he makes them what they ought to be," said Eileen softly. "In public as in private life it is by expecting people to be saints and heroes that a man makes them so."

"And makes a fool of himself at the same time."

"Perhaps. Some people have a high opinion of a certain sort of foolishness; Saint Paul, for instance."

"Well, mark my words, both the Duke of Mershire and Stillingfleet will wreck their political careers by this absurd attempt to fuse ourselves and the colonies into one great and united whole; the country won't stand it, for the days of heroism and patriotism are as dead as the days of post-chaises and stage-coaches. It doesn't matter to the Duke at seventy-five, but it does to Stillingfleet at thirty-nine."

"It's a pity, as you say," remarked Archie, "that old Mark hasn't a wife to put the curb on and keep him straight."

"He has plenty of women friends, though," suggested Lady Amy; "can't they do anything?"

"Oh! friends don't tot up to much when a man has to be told of his faults: he wants a wife for that little job," her husband replied.

"I don't much believe in Platonic friendships," said Lady Clayton.

"Neither do I," Eileen agreed: "a man always cares too much or too little to be a woman's friend."

"Here is Mark himself," Lady Clayton said, "coming across the fields from Crompton."

"I knew I should see him to-day," said Eileen, "because I saw someone in the village this morning whom I mistook for him; and it is a queer thing that if ever you see anybody whom you mistake for somebody else, you always see the real somebody else afterwards; I've often noticed that. I suppose it means that it is the day-out for people of a particular pattern."

"I have noticed it, too," added Lady Clayton, "though I don't think I ever heard it put into words before. But now that we've got him to ourselves, we'll all talk to Mark, and make him hear reason."

Her husband sighed.

"But he won't listen to reason; that is the difficulty. 'Quem Deus vult perdere, prius dementat.'"

CHAPTER V

AFTER THE HOUNDS

Rich Lent-lilies that are wasting
Gold upon the lonely lea,
Grudge us not our bitter tasting
Of the fatal knowledge-tree.

—*Verses Grave and Gay.*

"WHERE is the meet to-day?" asked Eileen at breakfast the following morning.

"'Pon my life!" exclaimed Archie, "I do like the way in which all you Irish Johnnies sound your 'h's' in such words as 'where' and 'whether.' It sounds awfully fetching."

"But don't English people sound their 'h's,' too?" asked Sophy, who was ever athirst for information.

"Not as a rule when there is a 'w' before it," her father explained; "we say 'wear' and 'weather,' instead of 'where' and 'whether.'"

"And it doesn't sound half so neat," added Archie. "I say, Eileen, I wish to goodness you'd just teach us the trick; tell us how you do the job, and we'll soon follow suit, and have a bewitching brogue that you could cut with a knife."

"Oh, it is quite simple!" replied the Irish woman, with becoming modesty.

"But tell us how you do it," persisted Sophy, when she had already choked twice in the attempt and had been patted violently on the back by her affectionate brother.

"You just begin like a kiss and end like a gargle, and

there you are,—‘where’ and ‘whether’ and ‘what-not,’ and all the rest of them!”

“I greatly dislike provincialisms of any kind,” said Mr. Bamfield; “they always partake of the nature of vulgarity. I wish, Sophia, you would leave off choking,” he added, as if his wife were continuing the exercise for her own selfish pleasure. “It is a detestable habit, and one which I have noticed is growing upon you.”

“It was only a crumb,” began Sophy, and then went off into a fresh paroxysm, Archie meanwhile recommencing his brotherly ministrations to her back.

“It is a most remarkable thing,” said Eileen, “that people who are choking will always jeopardize their lives by explaining the cause of the accident, which is of no interest to anybody. They will use up their last breath in gasping out that it was only a crumb or a drop of water—as if their friends believed for a moment that it was a hogshhead of beer or a mutton-chop.”

Her hostess agreed with her.

“You are quite right, my dear; I never knew anyone who was content to choke without endeavouring to explain the reason.”

“But where is the meet?” repeated Miss St. Just; “you have all been so busy discussing the form in which my question was put that no one has answered it—parliamentary behaviour, I admit, but I don’t happen to be a constituency.”

“It is at Baxendale Hall to-day,” replied Archie; “and I hope little Mrs. Baxendale herself will be out. She’s a nice woman is little Mrs. Baxendale—quite one of my sort; and Baxendale himself isn’t half a bad fellow.”

“They’ve got adorable children,” said Lady Amy. “I think little Alwyn, the eldest, is one of the nicest boys I ever saw.”

“But Nora, the girl is a deuced sight prettier,” added her husband.

“That is as it should be,” said Lady Clayton; “it is

always a good thing in a family for the daughters to monopolize the beauty, and the sons the brains."

"Well, I made a corner of the beauty in our family concern, worse luck for Sophy! And no one seemed to catch hold of the brains at all."

"Sophy was quite as good-looking as you when I married her, though in a different style," remarked Gregory.

"And so she ought to have been. My style would have run a bit massive in a girl—thirteen-stone-two would have been rather too much of even such a good thing as Mrs. Gregory B."

"I think that Sophy isn't at all bad-looking now," said Sophy's father, with one of his kindest smiles.

But Mrs. Bamfield was thinking of matters more important than mere personal appearance; having recovered from her choke, she was busy in making plans for the day.

"I don't think I shall ride to the meet," she said; "I think I shall go on a bicycle for a change."

"I hate to see a woman on a bicycle at a meet," remarked her husband.

"What is your reason for this programme?" asked Eileen.

"Whenever people say that they prefer bicycles to horses, I always know there are wheels within wheels."

"Well, the fact is that riding a bicycle makes me thinner than riding a horse."

"Don't say thinner," cried Archie, correcting his sister; "say less stout. When you mention the word 'thin' in connection with yourself, it makes us think you vain."

"I hate bicycles," said Eileen; "they never amuse me in the least."

"Oh, I love them!" ejaculated Sophy, "except when I get a puncture; then they are a nuisance, I admit."

"It is so difficult nowadays," Eileen continued, "to tell the difference, at a little distance, between a puncture and a proposal. You come upon a young man upon his knees in a grassy lane at the feet of a young woman, and you say to

yourself, 'The days of romance are not over ; these also are in Arcady !' But as you come nearer you discover that the suppliant is not proposing at all, but only pumping. Such is the romance of to-day."

"Well, for my part," said Archie, "I'd a deuced sight rather propose than pump—even if my proposal *was* accepted. 'There is nothing on earth that I hate more than going bicycling with a pack of women, and being expected to pump for them every time they hop on to a thorn."

"It does take the wind out of your sails certainly," agreed Eileen.

"Well," said the hostess, rising from the table, "I think that those of you who are riding to hounds to-day ought to be starting soon, or else you'll be late."

"But I haven't finished my breakfast !" Archie remonstrated. "I can't keep body and soul together with two or three shreds of marmalade ; they aren't strong enough for the job."

Sophy opened her brown eyes wide.

"Oh, Archie, you've had lots more to eat than that ! You've had some fish and a mutton-chop, and——"

"Ungrateful girl to speak like that when it was in order to save your worthless life that I went without my proper rations ! 'Pon my life, a chap can't eat much and thump your back at the same time ; for a back as broad as yours takes a lot of thumping to cover the whole area."

"Well, you'll have to be content with what you've had, however little it may have been," said Lady Amy ; "there isn't time for you to eat any more."

"Well, I shall make time, my dear," said her husband ; "time and space."

"Then what am I to say when people call my husband greedy ?"

"They won't call him greedy," said Eileen. "You'll call him greedy, and they'll agree with you ; and then you'll say, and believe, that they called him greedy. That is always

the way when things have been repeated behind one's back. The repeater says, and believes, that somebody else made a certain remark about you; yet all the time you may make perfectly sure that it was the repeater who actually said the thing, and the other person acquiesced—or, rather, didn't actually contradict it."

"That is quite true, Eileen," said Lady Clayton.

"In the same way," Eileen continued, "you may make your mind easy that if anybody says anything to you about somebody else, that remark will be repeated to somebody else as your own original and spontaneous utterance, unless, at the first reading of the bill, you use violent and unparliamentary language in giving it the lie; and that is such an altogether tiresome and boring thing to do, and makes you appear like a woman with convictions; and a woman with convictions is worse than a Little-Englander, and as bad as a farmer who uses barbed wire."

Archie rose from the table with a sigh.

"From meat to meet they hurry me to banish my regret; and when they win a smile from me, they erroneously imagine that I've had enough to eat," he murmured.

"Not bad for you!" exclaimed Eileen.

"Puns are always bad," Gregory remarked.

Eileen shook her head.

"No, they're not; but they are like Stilton cheese—they are only good when they are bad."

"Well," said Gregory, "it beats me how sensible people—at least people who call themselves sensible—can waste their time and their breath in talking the utter nonsense that certain persons talk."

"Pray don't call it waste," his brother-in-law remonstrated; "it is true hospitality. We call nothing wasted, old chappie, that makes you feel more at home with us, and that brings our blooming intellects down to your level."

Sir Conrad walked to the window and looked out.

"Certainly a southerly wind and a clouded sky proclaim

it a hunting morning," he quoted ; then, turning to his son, he asked, " What horse are you going to ride to-day, Archie?"

" Claptrap."

" Oh no, my boy ; I wouldn't ride Claptrap ! He is a dangerous brute."

" All the better for that. It will give me something to do. I don't care to go to sleep during a run if I can help it ; but, by Jove ! it's sometimes a hard job to keep awake, if a fellow goes hunting on one of your easy-chairs."

" I wish you were not so reckless, Archie," said his ather with a sigh.

" Bless you, guv'nor, this child isn't reckless ! He knows how to take care of himself. But I can't very well ride to hounds in a Bath-chair with the glass down, which is the sort of mount that you'd fancy for me."

It certainly was perfect weather for hunting ; and as it was one of the last days of the season, an unusually large field was assembled in front of Baxendale Hall when the party from Tettleigh Towers rode up. As Eileen felt the breath of spring on her face and the thrill of sport in her blood, she realized that the world was very good ; and when Mark Stillingfleet rode up to speak to her, and she knew that she was looking her best on the magnificent mount which her host had lent her, she understood that it was still better than she had at first supposed.

Breakfast was spread in the dining-room ; and there the squire and his charming wife entertained their guests with their usual hospitality. The unclouded bliss of her married life had made Nancy Baxendale handsomer as a woman than she had been as a girl, for there is no aid to beauty so successful as happiness ; and her husband had put away once and for all the sadness and reserve born of the sorrowful time which preceded his marriage, and was now almost as cheerful and radiant as she.

It was the largest and merriest meet of the season. They found in a small spinney lying to the west of Baxendale

Park ; and there was a sharp run of fifty minutes across country, past Mattingham, in the direction of Northbridge. They killed in the open, and found again near Mattingham ; and then there was another famous run of close on an hour. But poor Archie Clayton was not destined to see the end of this second run. He was leading the field, and was riding even harder than usual to-day, for Claptrap was difficult to hold when the brute's blood was up. It was when the hounds were in full cry, and Archie not far behind them, that Claptrap took a pretty hard fence. The horse would have got over it all right if it had not been for some barbed wire at the top ; and they were going at such a breakneck pace that Archie did not see it until it was too late to pull up. Over they went, Claptrap catching his hind-legs in the wire in the process ; and then horse and man rolled over and over in hopeless confusion, and lay huddled in a motionless heap in the ditch on the other side !

CHAPTER VI

NO GOD

We will talk of the hour when I met you—
Of the days when we met again—
Of the years that I tried to forget you,
And tried (how I tried !) in vain.

—*Love's Argument.*

"Do you think that Archie will die?" asked Eileen, as she and Mark rode sadly home together on that memorable Easter Tuesday. Poor Archie had been picked up unconscious but still alive, and had been sent to Tettleigh in a carriage, his father and a doctor accompanying him. As for Claptrap, his back was broken, and he had to be shot where he lay.

"I don't know," Mark replied. "I'm afraid he is a good bit knocked about, poor fellow! But while there is life there is hope, you know."

"It will kill Sir Conrad if anything happens to Archie: he adores him so."

"It takes a good deal of trouble to kill a man." And Mark sighed. "Men don't die as easily as all that—not even the sickly ones, worse luck for them! And Sir Conrad is an exceptionally strong man."

They rode on for a while in silence and in thought, Eileen pondering on that world-old indifference of Nature to the sorrows of her children which made the spring sunshine, that had been the delight of the morning, the mockery of the afternoon; and Mark wondering why a strong and happy man such as Archie, with a wife and children to

mourn him, should be struck down when it was yet noon, while a delicate and lonely individual like himself was left to tread the desolate path to the very end of the way.

Then Eileen suddenly said:

"I don't understand Sir Conrad. He seems to have got everything he wanted, and yet to have missed the thing he wanted most. He is the most absolutely successful man I ever met; and yet no one, for even five minutes, could mistake him for a happy one."

"I think you are confusing terms. He has got everything he wished for, but not everything he wanted. There is a vast difference between the two."

"What do you think he wished for?" asked Eileen.

"For rank and wealth, and success and power, and for everything that the man of this world usually does wish for; and he has received good measure, pressed down and running over."

"And what do you think he wanted?"

Mark was silent for a moment; then he answered gravely: "What everybody wants, and without which no living soul can be satisfied,—God."

"Then do you mean to say that nobody can be happy without religion?"

Mark smiled.

"I didn't mention the word 'religion.' You are confusing terms again: it is rather a weakness of yours."

"Then what do you mean? Please tell me."

"I only mean that different sides of a human soul are made for different things, and that nothing but the satisfaction of its particular need can render a particular side of the soul complete. Nothing else will do instead. There is one side of a man which cries out for a career, and no amount of domestic happiness will ever satisfy that side; there is a side which cries out for the love of a wife, and no amount of maternal or sisterly affection will ever satisfy that side; and there is a side which cries for God Himself, and

no amount of human companionship will ever satisfy that side."

"So Sir Conrad's demands were greater than he knew?"

"Yes; that was his mistake. It is the same mistake he makes in dealing with other people. The demands of the country are greater than he knows: it is hungering for the bread of fellowship with its sister-lands beyond the seas, and he offers it the stone of selfish prosperity and commercial success. He underrates his fellows as he has always underrated himself."

"I quite agree with you, Mr. Stillingfleet. Sir Conrad is always, from a spiritual point of view, standing lower than his own stature and walking slower than his own pace."

"Yes; he is a better, and a less clever, man than he thinks. And then he is over-cautious; which is a great mistake in a statesman."

"That is true," said Eileen, "and sometimes his caution runs away with him, so to speak; and induces him prematurely to end in folly what he reluctantly began in tears."

Mark laughed, and Eileen continued:

"But it is rather inconsistent of you to quarrel with Sir Conrad for being cautious and afraid of consequences, because you're a great stickler for consequences yourself. I've heard you say heaps of times that the childish game of Consequences is a game which we go on playing all our lives. It is a favourite remark of yours."

"And a very good remark, too. I'll make it once again if you like; it's worth it."

"You needn't, because I remember it so well. But why blame Sir Conrad for doing what you do?"

"There you are confusing terms again. What Sir Conrad is afraid of is not so much 'the consequences' as 'what the world says': the next item on the accepted programme of the game, if my memory serves me aright."

Eileen looked up at him eagerly.

"I see : you are afraid of consequences yourself ?"

"Terribly !"

"But not one scrap of what the world says ?"

"Not one scrap."

And the woman knew that the man was speaking the truth ; and admired him with all her heart accordingly.

After another pause she remarked :

"I believe that all life is rather like a game of Consequences, if you come to think of it. There's He and She, and where they met, and what they were doing, and what He said, and what She said, and what the consequences were, and what the world said : and real life doesn't include more than this."

"Except what He didn't say : there's a good deal of that in real life."

"And of course there's also what She didn't say."

Mark shook his head.

"Oh ! that doesn't tot up to much."

"Then do you think that what She says discloses less than what He doesn't say ?"

"I think it conceals more."

At this they both laughed and rode on side by side, happy in spite of the terrible tragedy which they had just seen enacted before their eyes, simply because they were together.

But when they reached Tettleigh Towers the tragedy rose up again and hit them in the face. They could no longer feel happy—even though they were together—in such an atmosphere of grief as this. Poor Archie was still unconscious, and the doctor could give no opinion as to whether he would ever regain consciousness again. His family were of course distracted, and the servants were rushing about in that state of panic and demoralization which a sudden catastrophe always produces.

As Eileen was walking through the deserted ball-room on her way to her own apartment, which lay in the new wing

of the house, she found Sir Conrad sitting in the chimney-corner, his head bowed in his hands. He raised it as he heard her light footstep on the polished oak floor; and she was appalled to see how a few hours of mortal anguish can age a strong man.

"He will die!" he said, and his voice was almost a groan,—*"I know he will die. Nothing can save him this time."*

"He is in God's Hands," Eileen gently replied.

Sir Conrad threw back his head with a fierce gesture of defiance.

"There is no God!"

"I think there is."

"There is not, I tell you! There is a cruel and relentless Power Which crushes us in Its pitiless omnipotence, and then mocks at our despair—a merciless Juggernaut Which rides ruthlessly over us, and then laughs at our helplessness and pain! But there is no God of love and of pity, as the Christians teach. No, no, Eileen, in the sense which you mean, there is no God!"

Eileen's face was tender with a great compassion.

"Isn't there?" she said softly. "Wait and see."

CHAPTER VII

SIR BASIL'S ADVICE

Long silence shall serve but to sweeten
The sound of life's triumph-chord,
When the years that the locust hath eaten
To us shall be all restored.

—*Love's Argument.*

"THAT was a narrow shave of Archie Clayton's," said Sir Basil Forbes to Mark Stillingfleet as the two men were walking down to the House together, not long after the Easter recess.

"It was; I thought the poor fellow was done for. Archie is always having narrow shaves like that. It seems as if some ill fate pursued him."

"Stuff and nonsense! There are no such things as fate and luck, my dear Stillingfleet. Archie is reckless, and does not know what fear means: that is all that his pursuing fate, as you call it, amounts to."

"I suppose you are right. Still, Archie's constant escapades of this kind are apt to get on the nerves of the people who care for him."

"They certainly get on his father's nerves. It is amazing to me how an otherwise strong and sensible man, such as Clayton, is so absurdly nervous wherever Archie is concerned."

"He is desperately fond of Archie, you see; and being fond of people is apt to make one nervous on their behalf."

"That might apply to a highly-strung temperament such

as yours, Stillingfleet; but it is incongruous for a calm and dispassionate nature like Clayton's to be nervous about anything or anybody."

"It is incongruous for a calm and dispassionate man like Clayton to be such a devoted father; but, all the same, I never knew a man more wrapped up in his children—especially in Archie—than he is."

"A man must be wrapped up in something, both figuratively and literally: our climate and human nature demand it; and he is happier when the wrap is his own peculiar property, and not merely an official vestment. Of course there are men—such as yourself for instance—who are wrapped up in politics and in public affairs, to the exclusion of domestic interests; but I cannot recommend the style of covering, from a professional point of view. It strikes me as inadequate for the immortal soul in a world as cold and unsympathetic as this one."

A shadow fell over Mark's expressive face.

"It is not a particularly satisfactory garment I admit, but it is warmer than nothing. It is better for one's soul to be dressed in a little brief authority, than left to starve to death in 'the wind that blows between the worlds.'"

"A little brief authority is all very well for what ladies call 'a carriage wrap'; but a human soul wants something warmer underneath, or else it will most assuredly catch a chill."

"It is so difficult to find something suitable, in which one's soul can be wrapped up," said Mark with a sigh. "Ready-made things don't seem to fit; and the things that are made to fit are generally too expensive and out of one's reach."

"Are you sure of that?" asked Sir Basil, with a quick glance at his companion.

"Quite sure," was the quiet answer.

"I'm not."

"Well, at any rate I am sure it is true in my case, though

it may not be so in others. Every man knows his own business best."

Now, being a doctor, Sir Basil was clever enough to understand that every man does not always know his own business best—in fact, often quite the reverse; but being a doctor, he was also clever enough not to say so.

"Of course there are exceptions," he remarked; "but, as a rule, it is best for every man to marry. Do you remember the tale of the man who said that married men live longer than single ones, and his melancholy friend replied, 'It isn't really longer, but it seems longer'? Now, statistically, the first speaker was right: married men actually live longer than single ones, whatever it may seem, because they are better looked after and taken care of."

"I shall never marry."

"Yet you want looking after and taking care of, Stillingfleet, if ever a man did."

"I can't help that. Such aids to longevity, either actual or apparent, are not for me."

Though Mark spoke lightly his face was very sad.

"There are hundreds of girls who would simply jump at a man in your position—and really nice girls, too."

"I know that well enough; but what I should want would be a wife for the man, and not merely a mate for the Minister."

"You mean you'd want all that love-me-for-my-own-sake business—as if a man could be taken apart from his rank, any more than a woman can be taken apart from her beauty."

"That would be my idea."

The doctor shrugged his shoulders.

"That is the worst of you ideal, romantic sort of men; you must have all or nothing."

"Hang it all, man! considering that I'm content with the nothing, I don't see what grounds you have for finding

fault with me! I'd rather it had been the all, I confess; but as long as I have one or other of my alternatives, and not the insupportable something which you and the rest of my friends are so fond of prescribing for me, I can grin and bear it."

"Well, I can't help saying that I think you are mistaken. Something may not be as good as all; but it is a precious sight better than nothing. Your foreign policy may be as admirable as the papers choose to say—I daresay it is; but I don't think much of your domestic policy, Stillingfleet, and it is no use pretending that I do. Domestic policy, like charity, should begin at home. Now look how happy Archie Clayton is in his marriage, yet no one ever imagined that there was any fairy-princess business about that match. They suit each other admirably."

"That may be; but Archie and I are two different people."

"By the way," remarked Sir Basil with apparent irrelevance, "talking of Archie and accidents reminds me, have you ever noticed a little scar on Miss St. Just's left arm?"

"I have."

There was little about Miss St. Just that the late Secretary for War had not noticed.

"Do you know how she came by it?"

"No."

"That is a pity. It is rather an interesting story."

"I am sure of that."

Any story connected with Eileen was replete with interest for Mark Stillingfleet.

"If I were you, Stillingfleet, I should ask her some time to tell me the story of that little scar."

"I will," answered Mark, as the two men crossed the great courtyard of the Palace at Westminster, causing a slight flutter in a bevy of parliamentary pigeons.

The following day Mark Stillingfleet was having tea with Miss St. Just. They had discussed the political situation in

all its aspects, and Mark had risen to take his leave, when he suddenly said :

"By the way, will you tell me the story of that little scar on your left arm?"

The warm colour rushed over Eileen's face.

"Who told you anything about it?" she asked.

She was sharp enough to know that, left to himself, he would never have formulated such a question.

"I have often noticed it; I notice everything that has anything to do with you."

"Nevertheless, you would never have thought of asking about it off your own bat. Somebody has put you up to it, and it wasn't the War Office; the War Office knows nothing about arms as modern as mine—they aren't in its department. Mine are by no means of the newest make, worse luck! but they are too new for the War Office. Who was it?"

"Well, if you will have it, it was Sir Basil Forbes."

"Ah, how nice of you to tell me the truth! You really are a most charmingly truthful person!"

"Thank you."

Mark always felt absurdly elated when Eileen praised him in her chaffing way—like a schoolboy who has just won a prize.

"I cannot tell you how much I admire your habit of always telling the truth—it is so successful in leading people astray."

"Still it doesn't seem to be leading you astray in the present instance. You swallowed Sir Basil as implicitly as if he had been one of his own doses."

"But I'm not people, you see; I'm me."

"Yes, you're you; and that certainly does make a world of difference." Mark's smile was very tender just then. "But you haven't told me the story of the little scar," he continued, "and I'm simply yearning to hear it."

Eileen blushed again.

"I can't tell it you—I really can't."

"Oh yes, you can! We are such old friends that surely you can tell me anything!"

"I can't tell you that. But you can tell Sir Basil that he has my permission to tell you himself if he likes."

"Very well."

And with that Mark had to be content.

He and Sir Basil Forbes dined at the House that night; and as they were sitting on the Terrace in the moonlight after dinner, enjoying their respective cigars and discussing the prospects of the party in the coming General Election, Mark suddenly said:

"By the way, I saw Miss St. Just this afternoon, and asked her to tell me the story of the little scar on her left arm."

Sir Basil looked curiously at his companion.

"And did she?"

"No, she wouldn't. But she said I might tell you that you had her permission to tell me if you liked."

"Did she say that?"

"Yes."

"Well then, I certainly do like; and I will tell you here and now. To my mind it is a pity you were not told some years ago; but that was Miss St. Just's business—not mine."

And then, sitting in the shadow of that splendid pile where history is manufactured and laws are made, while the river rippled past them like a flood of molten silver in the light of the summer moon, Sir Basil Forbes told Mark Stillingfleet the whole story of that other summer night when he and Death had a hand-to-hand struggle at Castle Carnoch, and when Eileen St. Just came to the rescue and held the great enemy at bay.

Mark sat very still during the recital; he was one of the men who are always most quiet when most moved. But as soon as the story was done he rose to his feet and held out his hand to the doctor.

"Thank you for telling me this," he said, and his voice trembled. "It has changed the whole world for me."

And as Sir Basil looked up into the face of the younger man, he understood what the old Book meant when it described the face of Stephen as the face of an angel.

"Where are you going?" he asked, as Mark made as if to leave him.

"Straight to her. Where else could I go after hearing what I have just heard?"

"But there is the division-bell ringing."

"Hang the division-bell! Let it ring!" And before his companion could stop him, Mark Stillingfleet had disappeared.

Sir Basil laughed softly as he climbed the stairs on his way to the House.

"To think that I should live to hear an ex-Minister speak disrespectfully of the division-bell!" he said to himself.

"Love has ruled the court and the camp and the grove for some centuries, according to tradition; but if he gets his nose into the House of Commons in this way, goodness only knows what the country will come to!"

CHAPTER VIII

THE LITTLE SCAR

When we know beyond doubt or debating
We were meant to be one at last,
We shall smile at the season of waiting,
Which will fade as a dream that's past.

—*Love's Argument.*

"Is Miss St. Just at home?"

It was Mark Stillingfleet who asked the question, standing on the steps of the house in Park Lane.

"His lordship and her ladyship are dining out," the footman informed him, "but Miss St. Just is in the small drawing-room." So to the small drawing-room Mark repaired.

Eileen, who was reading a novel, started up when he was announced; and the moment she saw his face she knew that something wonderful had happened.

"What is it?" she cried, going to meet him with outstretched hands. "What have you come to tell me? Have the Liberals come in again, and have you been made Prime Minister?"

"Neither the one nor the other," replied Mark, taking her in his arms: "but something infinitely more important than either. Forbes has told me the story of the little scar." And then he gave her some of the kisses which had been accumulating to her account in the bank of his heart for the last twenty years.

As soon as she was able to speak, Eileen said with a shy little laugh :

“And were you very much surprised ?”

“More than surprised, my sweet : amazed—transfigured—transformed.” And again Mark proceeded to pay off some of that debt which had lain to Miss St. Just’s credit for so long. Then he said : “Tell me that you love me, my darling.”

Eileen shook her head.

“You know that already ; and it is extremely feeble and departmental to give people information that they already possess. I never do it : I am far too good a talker.”

“You must do it now.”

“But you know it,” she persisted.

“Not officially ; it has not yet come out in the evidence.”

“Hasn’t it ? I should rather have thought it had : for Sir Basil said it might kill me.”

“My darling, my darling, how I adore you !” And there were tears in Mark’s eyes as he pushed up her short sleeve and kissed the little scar over and over again. Then he put her at arm’s length and gazed at her ; and lo ! the sudden joy had wiped the record of the last score of years from off the woman’s face, and she looked like a young girl once more—not the fashionable woman of the world whom London alternately feared and admired, but the half-shy, half-laughing creature, little more than school-girl, whom Mark Stillingfleet had met and worshipped at Castle Carnoch so many years ago. And as he saw this he realized the wonderful truth that the years which the locust hath eaten can be restored to us, and restored with compound interest—given always that the destruction of them in the first instance was the locust’s doing and not our own. It is the things which we do ourselves, either of evil impulse or of set purpose—the

things which are therefore of sin—for which fate offers us no forgiveness and life no compensation. The cup which we fill with our own hands we must drink to the dregs; but the water of bitterness, which other hands have poured out for us to our apparent undoing, and to which we have felt bound as in duty to put patient though trembling lips, shall be turned into the very wine of life by the Ruler of the feast when at last the hour for it is come. Wherefore we do well to wait in all patience for the striking of that hour; knowing that though men at the beginning set forth their good wine, He keeps the best until last for those men and women who are worthy to drink of it new in His Father's kingdom—which kingdom is here and now.

"Tell me, my own," Mark repeated,—“tell me that you love me.”

And the woman who had become a girl again obeyed him.

"My darling, I do so love you—I adore you. There never was anybody in the wide world but you!"

And then they sat down side by side, while Mark told Eileen the whole story of how he had loved her from the very beginning, and of how Sophy had gone near to spoiling it all, and of how she had not quite succeeded, because of that Divinity which still shapes our ends in spite of the rough-hewing of the Sophy Bamfields of this world.

"My sweet, I shall be a very poor match for you," he said in conclusion; "but I mean to marry you all the same."

"You are an ex-Minister. That is really extremely respectable—almost as respectable as being a church-warden."

"But I shan't be a current Minister again, I can assure you. The Liberal Imperialist party is strong, I know,—far stronger than is dreamed of in Clayton's philosophy;

but it isn't sufficiently strong to out-vote the rest of the Liberals *plus* the whole Conservative party."

"Still, don't you think a good many Tories will go with us at the General Election?"

"My dear child, did you ever know a Conservative who voted against his party when the time came? I never did."

"Then you don't think we shall come back to office after the election?"

"I do not, nor for many years after. Now the Tories are in, they'll stick; it is a way they have."

"While we Liberals are like stamps that aren't quite gummy enough; we cease to stick at the slightest friction."

"We do, worse luck!" agreed Mark.

"Never mind, dear," whispered Eileen, nestling up to him, "we can be quite happy without the sweets of office as long as we've got each other. I'm sure you'll find it much more entertaining to make love to me than to order about a permanent staff."

"But I propose to order you about as well as to make love to you: the latter will be for your pleasure, and the former for mine."

"All right," said Eileen, with a happy laugh; "and we'll live in the country, and not be a bit modern or fashionable, but do all the things that Ruskin and Wordsworth and people like that would have approved of."

"We will, my sweet."

"We'll stroke pet lambs and sit side by side upon weather-cocks, and generally be deliciously rustic and rural, won't we?"

"And most divinely happy," added Mark.

"It will be perfectly lovely," Eileen continued—"like one prolonged and glorified picnic."

"But, sweetheart, I'm afraid I shan't have much money. You see, I have sacrificed my private practice to my official duties; and now that my official duties have come to an end

with my official income, there isn't much to fall back upon. I daresay that in a year or two I shall be able to pull a decent practice together; but in the meantime I shall be distinctly a poor man."

"Oh, I don't mind that! It will make it all the more picnicky, don't you know? if our lodging is on the cold ground, and hard, very hard, is our fare!"

"Well, my darling, our lodging won't be exactly on the cold ground; but I'm afraid it will be on the Front Opposition Bench for some years to come."

"I don't care," persisted Eileen; "in fact, I shall prefer it. I'm sure that Opposition will be much more picnicky than Office."

"Naturally, considering that a picnic is solely designed for those who are outside; but for my part I enjoy less *al fresco* entertainments—at any rate where Governments are concerned."

"By the way, Mark," said Eileen, after certain further remarks which had no reference to politics, "you haven't proposed to me; and I'm sure you ought to have done so before going on like this."

"But you've accepted me,—that's the great thing."

"Still, there is a distressing absence of red-tape in accepting a man before he proposes—an absence of red-tape which is nothing short of culpable in a quondam representative of the War Office. It seems to me that I'm worse than Miss Biddy Something-or-Other, who 'refused the Captain before he axed her': I've accepted you before you axed me."

"My darling, I've been asking you all these years, if you'd only known."

Eileen shook her head.

"You didn't give proper notice of the question—you know you didn't. It was a most slipshod and unofficial way of doing business, and you ought to be ashamed of yourself."

"Well I'm not. I'm awfully proud of myself—and most especially of you."

"But you ought to propose properly—you must propose properly; it is the correct thing to do—it really is: like Black Rod knocking at the door of the House, when it has just been locked in his face for the fun of unlocking it again. But it's things like this which are the strength of a monarchy, be the monarch Edward the Seventh or only Cupid the First."

"Very well, let us keep up the good old customs at all costs. By the way," said Mark, touching first the top of Eileen's dark brown coils and then the top of her pretty shoe, "I want all this for my very own. Can you let me have it, please?"

"It has always been yours. It was originally made for you, I think."

"Then that accounts for its fitting me so perfectly," said Mark, taking her in his arms once more; "none of your ready-made stock sizes for me!"

"And it never could have fitted anybody else. In fact, it didn't, though lots tried it on—like Cinderella's shoe. But it was all of no use till you came by and put your foot in it."

"And I did put my foot in it, too, with a vengeance, didn't I? I nearly spoilt everything by believing Sophy's rot."

"You were stupid, Mark, I must confess; even for a Member of Parliament!"

"I was a confounded ass! But it's all over now, isn't it? Tell me that you have forgiven me, my sweet."

"You don't forgive Ministers for being stupid. You pass votes of confidence in them just to show that you privately condemn them as fools and publicly uphold them as wise men."

"And that is what you are doing by becoming engaged to me?"

"Yes; it is a strictly official way of doing things, and I'm nothing if not official. I'm just the wife for a Government. I'm clothed from head to foot in red-tape—for those who have eyes to see."

"My sweet!" Mark murmured.

"By the way, how long exactly have you been in love with me?" asked Eileen, after another delightful pause in the conversation.

"Ever since one day at Castle Carnoch, innumerable years ago, when you winked at me out of the hammock."

"Oh, what a story! I didn't wink!" exclaimed Miss St. Just indignantly. "And it wasn't at you at all; it was at Sophy. She was talking her usual sensible nonsense, if you remember."

"She was; and she can do it when she spreads herself, can Sophy—none better. But if you didn't wink at me, then the hammock played the spider and wove meshes to entrap the hearts of men—and of your humble servant in particular."

"And you've been in love with me ever since the day that I winked—I mean that I didn't wink at you?"

"Yes, to be accurate, I fell in love with you at the exact moment when, as you say, you didn't wink. The moment when you didn't wink at me was the psychological moment when I fell in love with you; and there I have remained ever since, and there I shall remain—even after I am married to you, my own."

Eileen laughed a laugh of perfect content.

"I wonder if you will really like being married to such a fashionable, political woman as I am?"

"I shall adore it."

"But I shan't be at all a domesticated wife."

"Bless me, I don't want a domesticated wife! I've no use for the article. Fling your domesticated wives to those who want them. Goodness knows I don't!"

"I couldn't cook a dinner to save my life."

"I don't want you to cook, sweetheart. Sir Conrad Clayton has already cooked my goose for me."

"And I've never darned a stocking since I was born."

"I shan't ask you to darn stockings. My successor at the War Office is standing in my shoes, and therefore *his* wife can see after the shoes and the stockings also. *You* shan't be bothered with them."

"Still," persisted Eileen, "I can't help thinking that marrying me is rather like taking the Crystal Palace as a suburban residence."

"All right, I am content, and more than content, with my palace of delights." And a note of seriousness stole into the man's voice which for a moment made Eileen feel shy of him.

"Well," she said, "you'll have to bear in mind that those who live in glass houses mustn't throw stones."

"It won't be a glass house, silly little child! It will be a palace built of one perfect chrysolite—clear and faultless and altogether complete."

"You have been a very faithful swain," remarked Eileen, after another pause.

"I have. Far be it from me to dispute that statement!"

"I wonder to whose credit it is—yours or mine? Does it prove that I am unusually attractive or that you are unusually true?"

"A little of both, I should imagine."

Miss St. Just looked doubtful.

"I'm afraid the feather is in your cap this time. You see, one can win liking, but not love, because people like you for what you do, and love you for what you are. Therefore you can make them like you whenever you take the trouble to be nice to them for half an hour; but you can't make them love you, if they don't love you of themselves, without sending yourself back to be remade all over again, and cut out after a different pattern:

and that is difficult—not to say impossible—for goods that have been in stock for over thirty years.”

“But what you *are* is as much to your credit as what you *do*,” argued Mark.

“Oh no, it isn’t! You are as you were made, and you didn’t make yourself; but what you do is your own business, and is done afresh, either rightly or wrongly, every day.”

“Still, what you *do*, in the long run decides what you *are*.”

Eileen shrugged her shoulders.

“Can you look me in the face and tell me that you never in your life met anyone more beautiful or clever or amiable or unselfish or generally saintly (you must pay special attention to the saintliness) than I am?”

Mark smiled.

“Conscientiously I can’t. I can swallow the other things all right; but the saintliness does stick in my throat, I confess.”

“And yet you love me?”

“With all my heart and soul and strength!”

“But not for my virtues and excellences?”

“Heaven forbid!”

“Then what for?”

“Because you are you,” replied Mark, kissing the little hand that lay in his own.

“Pooh! a poor reason!”

“Pardon me, the only satisfactory reason in the whole world.”

“But it is no credit to me that I am Eileen St. Just.”

Mark’s eye twinkled.

“On the contrary, it is a failing which I shall do my best to remedy as soon as possible.”

“But even then I shall still be me.”

“Not you! You’ll be the better part of me.”

“I always knew you loved me,” remarked Eileen, “though I often thought you didn’t.”

"Ah! that was foolish of you, and didn't display your usual perspicacity."

"And I knew you'd tell me so in the end, though I'd no idea how long the end would be in coming."

"Neither had I."

"People were surprised I was in no hurry to marry," continued Eileen in a meditative voice; "but they didn't know I'd got the king up my sleeve the whole time."

"Was it the king, my own? I'm afraid it was only the knave."

"I think it must have been the king, Mark, because, you see, it took the trick."

"I'm sure it could only have been the knave, sweetheart, because the trick was taken by my queen, after all."

CHAPTER IX

THE GENERAL ELECTION

Stand, ye sons of England, in the centre of your story—
'Twixt the golden glow or glory that surrounds the British throne,
And the misty morning haze
Of the yet unnumbered days—
And declare if even Englishmen shall dare to stand alone !

—*Love's Argument.*

IT was fortunate for Mark Stillingfleet that the course of true love for once was running smoothly, for on the Front Opposition Bench, if rumour was to be relied on, relations were, to put it mildly, somewhat strained. There was some truth in these rumours ; and Eileen found that she saw less of her lover than might reasonably have been expected. But Mark Stillingfleet had a good deal on his hands, which sadly interfered with the more important duties of love-making. To begin with, he had resumed his practice at the Bar ; and so great was his reputation that briefs quickly began to flow in, in spite of his having in a great measure lost touch with the profession during the years he had held office. Moreover, private conferences between the Duke and the most trusted of his former colleagues were both numerous and prolonged. When Mark did snatch a few minutes to call upon Eileen, he was evidently burdened with the weight of grave decisions, though his look was resolute and cheerful.

The new Government, not having a majority and only

holding office on sufferance, made no attempt at fresh legislation, but were content simply to get through financial and other necessary business. It was well known that, on the completion of this, the House would be dissolved; and on this understanding the Liberals were offering no serious opposition to the Government proposals. But the leaders of the party had to decide on the policy they were to adopt for the coming election. The Duke absolutely refused again to take office on sufferance, and declared that the country was tired of old controversies and worn-out party cries. He was therefore in favour of a new departure. Thus there were dissensions among the leaders of the Opposition; and rumours of these dissensions soon got abroad. The late Premier, finding the bickerings of Sir Conrad intolerable, and unable to receive for his proposals the undivided support of his party, determined to take a bold course. Following distinguished precedent, he availed himself of the opportunity of a public dinner to give to the world a formal declaration of his determination to promote Imperial Federation. At his age he could not hope fully to carry out his proposals; but he wished before finally quitting public life to commit the country to this policy.

This brought matters to a head. Sir Conrad Clayton promptly repudiated his leader, declaring his intention of fighting the question inch by inch; and his example was followed by some others.

This naturally caused great delight to the Conservatives, whose chance of carrying the country with them at the General Election had been by no means so strong as they could have desired. But now that the Liberal leaders were quarrelling among themselves, the Government began to indulge in high hopes of an easy victory. Nor were their expectations without a very solid foundation. It seemed, indeed, that the Duke had made a fatal error. A large section of the party sympathized with Sir Conrad

Clayton in his dread of Imperial responsibilities. Sir Conrad himself went so far as to declare that the members who had supported the Duke would find to their cost when they faced their constituents that the electors were strongly opposed to the idea ; and he had little doubt that he and his supporters would sweep the polls, and come back with a majority, and that the dream of his life would be fulfilled by his becoming Prime Minister. To Mark, also, this seemed extremely likely if the Liberal split did not result in the triumph of the Tories. Upon him lay the burden of putting the case of the Liberal Imperialists before the country, as the Duke of course could not take part in the election ; and he found himself practically the leader of what seemed a forlorn hope. That was how he described himself to Eileen.

"Do you mean that you have no chance?" asked Eileen piteously.

"I won't say no chance, my darling, for in politics nothing happens save the unexpected," replied Mark cheerfully ; "but if I were a betting man I should lay long odds on Clayton."

"Then what's the use of fighting if when you come back to the House you'll all have lost your seats, and so have no leg to stand upon?"

"Because, my love, we've got to fight it out to the finish—win or lose. Besides, we have a chance. The people are sound enough at heart, if they only knew the facts. I shouldn't have a doubt about the result, if they were not so used to worn-out fallacies and shibboleths of the Clayton school. However, it's my business to try to enlighten them. If I only succeed in making them understand the question, they will vote all right after all."

"Then," said Miss St. Just in a matter-of-fact tone, "the question is settled."

"Against us?" asked Mark.

"Certainly not, you stupid boy. As if my young man couldn't make anything clear, even to the intelligence of the British electors! Why, you made yourself even clear to me, after blundering round for nearly twenty years."

"You are too sanguine, my sweet. What will you say when I come back to you defeated?"

"You will not come back defeated. But if you do," whispered Eileen, "I shall be so nice to you that you will say there is only one thing sweeter than victory, and that is defeat."

"My own darling, what a darling you are!" cried Mark. And he kissed her again and again.

Eileen tried to laugh, but her voice broke.

"My dearest, I do so love you," she whispered; "I am almost frightened when I realize how much."

In spite of Miss St. Just's most unwarrantable confidence in his persuasive powers, Mark was by no means sanguine. If it had been an ordinary case, the split in the Liberal Party would no doubt have led to the defeat of both sections of the party, and to the placing of the Conservatives in office for a considerable time. But Imperial Federation, as it turned out, proved a wondrous solvent of party ties. The Conservative leaders found that the rank and file of their party were not prepared to vote *en masse* against Federation; so that the fight quickly developed into a struggle between Imperialists and Little-Englanders. As this daily became more evident, the issue became more problematical.

Mark threw himself heart and soul into the struggle. It was no easy task that he had before him. He felt deeply the painful necessity of fighting those with whom he had been associated so long; more especially did it grieve him to oppose Sir Conrad, who had been so kind to him in past years, and to whom he owed the first step in his political

career. But with him his country was the first consideration ; before the supreme claim of England, all party ties, all personal relations, sank into insignificance. And in his speeches he contented himself with principles, avoiding as far as possible all personal references, in spite of the temptation to reply to many a bitter attack upon himself. He did this not only for the sake of old associations—he also had a certain sympathy with Sir Conrad personally, much as he disagreed with his present policy. Sir Conrad was growing old ; he had fought hard for old-fashioned Liberal principles, he had fought hard for the Premiership. The marvellous vitality of the Duke of Mershire had hitherto stood in the way of his advancement to the highest post ; and it did seem a little hard that the Duke, instead of retiring quietly and handing over the succession to Sir Conrad, should arouse this new question with the possibility of dashing the cup of success from the latter's lips just as he was on the point of drinking it. Still, sympathize with his old friend as he did, Mark opposed his policy with all his powers—never forgetting the courtesy due to the older and more experienced statesman, but never shrinking from exposing the latter's political errors.

It was at a great meeting at the Albert Hall that Mark Stillingfleet proclaimed the policy which he asked the country to adopt. The vast hall was filled in every part ; while on the platform were most, if not all, of the notables of the Liberal-Imperial party. Never before had Mark addressed such an audience ; and hardened as he was by the Law Courts and the House of Commons, it was with a touch of unaccustomed nervousness that he rose to speak. This was so apparent to those near him that they began to fear he would break down ; and Eileen, who was present, had a very bad five minutes indeed. But, as he proceeded, he soon discovered that the magic sympathy which ought to exist between speaker and audience was there, and then his nervousness disappeared. He began by regretting the

division in the party which he had served, and by recognizing the purity of the motives of Sir Conrad and his section, and claiming a like recognition for himself. He was not there to attack either his old friends or his old opponents, but to lay before his hearers his views on the political situation and the policy he desired his party to carry out. Times changed, and men changed with them; old party cries became obsolete, old party questions worn out. The country needed new policies and new methods. At home there were many questions all pressing for solution : there were social questions, such as education, the housing of the working classes, the relations between capital and labour, and many others concerning the bettering of the conditions of the people ; then there were the licensing laws, and the terrible plague of intemperance, which neither party had the courage to attack. He deprecated alike the fanaticism of the extremist and the *laissez-faire* of the pessimist.

If the country decided in favour of an Imperialist policy, these domestic questions would not be forgotten ; yet it was the question of the Empire on which the present election would turn. It behoved him therefore to enlarge on this subject. We could not escape from the fact that we had an Empire : how it was acquired was not the question, but what was to be done with it. First, he would lay down the principle that it could not be run on the cheap ; secondly, that it was a great inheritance, and that the responsibility, which we could not shirk, lay upon us of maintaining this inheritance. We had conquered India, for instance, and we could not rid ourselves of the task of ruling India, in the future as in the past, with wisdom and justice. Then there were our vast Colonies, stretching out willing hands across the seas. Let us clasp those hands and bind the Empire together in the bonds of a common love and a common freedom, thus establishing the peace of the world : not by badgering them for money, but by helping them

to develop their own manhood in the absolute freedom wherein alone true manhood can flourish—freedom of thought, freedom of speech, freedom of trade, freedom of policy. For this we needed a paramount navy and a strong army, not necessarily very large but absolutely efficient. Therefore reform of the War Office was a cardinal point in his programme. He had been Secretary for War himself, and hoped he had done something. But the red-tape and hide-bound traditions were appalling in their strength; and he asked for the support of the country in future efforts to render the War Office a business-like place. Men were sometimes staggered at the huge sums spent on armaments; but they must remember that this was simply national insurance-money. A weak navy meant a powerless England; and a powerless England meant war.

“This,” said the speaker in conclusion, “is the programme which I have to set before you. It is for you to accept or to refuse. Nevertheless I am not very careful as to how you may answer me in this matter; for I am convinced that the great end which I have in view shall finally be accomplished either by you or by your children’s children, rough hew it how you will with petty jealousies and party strife.

“There are some privileges which no one can refuse—some prerogatives no one can forego; and one of these is the glory of being an Englishman. You, the people of England, are the kings of England. You were anointed with the blood of your fathers, shed in the cause of freedom; you were crowned with the laurels which they won. From them you have inherited the Divine right of kingship—a right which no one, not even yourselves, can take away from you. Therefore as kings I do you homage; and as kings I bid you look well to your ways, and recognize the responsibilities of your office, lest you should be weighed in the balance and found wanting—lest

your kingdom should be wrested from you and given to another.

“But remember that kingship implies something more than crown jewels and coronation robes; it means the Divine right to take the government upon your shoulders—the Divine obligation to fulfil those laws which you yourselves lay down. The wider your rule, the graver are your responsibilities; the mightier your kingdom, the more multitudinous are your cares.

“Freedom is your watchword, liberty your glory; you would not be Englishmen were it not so. But have you forgotten that there is no bondage so severe as the bondage of freedom—no chain so unbreakable as the chain of liberty? Was there ever a class so free from the cares and responsibilities of life, free to the point of demoralization and effeminacy, as the negro slaves of America? Have you yourselves ever been so utterly free and irresponsible as you were in your schooldays? It was when the slaves of America were set free that they bowed down under the responsibilities of life; and it was when you yourselves became men, with wives and children to be guarded and provided for, that you knew that the careless days of truant playing were gone for ever. It is when a good man becomes his own master that his service is most stringent: a boy may hoodwink his schoolmaster, but a man cannot hoodwink himself. You might and did neglect your lessons without being much the worse for it; but a man cannot neglect the wife who trusts him and the children who depend upon him without doing despite to the common weal. Every true man in his own house fulfils the saying that he that is greatest of all is servant of all: in the very nature of things this must be so. The more despotic his sway, the more devoted his service. His freedom means his bondage to his own household; their dependence upon him means their absolute freedom among themselves.

“And what is true of men is also true of nations. England is no longer a pupil in the school of Europe, shirking her lessons and shifting her responsibilities whenever she has the chance : she is a great Empire, with the crown of conquest upon her head, and the sceptre of sovereignty in her hands ; she is responsible to God and to herself for all those daughter-lands which she has brought into being, and which would never have existed save for her. If her dependencies suffer, she is bound to suffer with them ; if they triumph, half their glory is hers. Nevertheless let her remember that she is the head, and that it is best for them as well as for her that she shall always remain so—or at any rate until her children are full-grown. A household where the parents are entirely sacrificed to the children is chaos rather than home.

“Therefore it is not for you, the rulers of England, to decide whether or no you will remain kings as you are this day : you have no choice in the matter. You cannot, try as you will, remove the crown from off your foreheads, nor wash away the oil wherewith you were anointed by God and your fathers long ago : though if you fail to keep your coronation oath—that oath which was written in blood and sealed with the lives of them which were placed in the forefront of the battle—yours will be the sin ; as yours will be the honour if you stablish still more firmly your fathers’ throne. But it is for you to decide whether this great thing, which must surely come to pass, shall come to pass here and now, adding lustre to your kingship and glory to your reign ; or whether you will stand upon the desolate mountain-tops of social individualism and political isolation, viewing as in a dream the greatest and most united Empire the world has ever seen,—knowing that your children and your children’s children shall enter into and possess this better country, but that you yourselves shall die in the wilderness of petty provincialism and party strife !

"Let this suffice you: I shall speak no more with you on this matter. I only bid you lift your eyes westward and northward and southward and eastward and behold for yourselves the glorious prospect now in view: and once again I remind you that it is for you here and now to decide whether or not you will go over this Jordan and enter into this promised land."

And the speaker sat down amid thunders of applause.

There were various opinions as to Mark Stillingfleet's speech. The Duke of Mershire, as he read it in *The Times* the next morning, shook his head gravely.

"It's over their heads," he muttered to himself: "our masters are not yet sufficiently educated to understand what he's driving at."

Sir Conrad Clayton rubbed his hands with glee as he read.

"He has given himself away completely!" cried he. "Can't think how a clever fellow like Mark can so misunderstand the British voter. Kings indeed! and duties and service! Much they care about duty! The first thing they want is beer—and the next thing is more beer."

The Tory leaders were puzzled what line to take. Social reform was a policy on which they piqued themselves. A strong navy and an efficient army were important planks of their platform; and as for their Empire, had not they for years been beating the big drum of Imperialism? At last they were forced to discover an attack on the Crown, and a base pandering to the lower orders, in the peroration.

As for Eileen, she was full of admiration of her lover's speech; and declared that henceforth the result of the election was a foregone conclusion.

Mark was less confident. Yet the woman's intuition was more accurate than the reasoning of the statesman. The Little-Englanders were completely routed, the Tories

lost many seats, and the Liberal Imperialists found themselves in a small but sufficient majority over any combination of their opponents. The Prime Minister did not wait for an adverse vote in Parliament; but, bowing to the verdict of the constituencies, tendered his resignation. The King sent for the Duke of Mershire, who, however, asked to be relieved from the duty of forming an administration, in consideration of his age. He felt that he had crowned his political career by the victory he had won for Imperial Federation, but that he was unequal to the strain of giving practical effect to the people's decision. He therefore advised the Crown to entrust the task to younger hands; and the next day the country was thrilled to hear that the King, on the advice of the Duke, had sent for Mark Stillingfleet.

CHAPTER X

DESPAIR

Vainly have I run my race,
Vainly worshipped gods of clay :
Now, too late, I learn your way,
Children in the market-place !

—*Verses Wise or Otherwise.*

SIR CONRAD sat alone in his library, with his life's ambitions fallen into hopeless ruin around him. This then was the end of it all, the end of the long years of work and waiting, of labour accomplished and of hope deferred. The Duke of Mershire had retired at last, leaving vacant the place which Conrad had coveted so long ; and, lo ! instead of straightway inheriting the kingdom prepared for him by his own devoted adherence to his party and his unceasing efforts to promote that party to power and keep it there at all costs, he had been compelled to stand aside and see a younger and far less experienced man enter into his labours, and wrest from him the place and power which were undoubtedly his due.

Had he but served his country with half the zeal with which he had served his party, he would not thus have been forsaken in his old age, he said to himself with a bitter smile. And herein lay the sting of it. It was his own doing from first to last—the natural consequence of a challenge he once threw down on an autumn morning

nearly half a century ago. For all his cruel disappointment, the man was too great a lawyer not to recognize that the justice he had bargained for he had had ; his pound of flesh he had indubitably received—neither more nor less ; and surely it was his doing rather than fate's that he had deliberately spent money for that which was not bread, and his labour for that which satisfied not. The Power Which ruleth over all had allowed him to choose for himself the path which he would tread ; and was that Power in any way to blame that he had chosen of his own free will the path which had led to political destruction rather than the path which led to national life ? Certainly not. It was his own choice, and there was no one to blame but himself.

Mark Stillingfleet had likewise chosen his path, and he also had been rewarded after his kind. While Sir Conrad measured men according to the ordinary standards, appealing to their lower rather than to their higher instincts, Mark, on the contrary, called out to the Divine in them rather than to the human—to the ideal rather than the apparent—and he did not call in vain. This was the whole thing in a nutshell ; this was the late Home Secretary's fundamental mistake. He had laughed at his younger colleague as an enthusiast and an idealist, and had patted himself on the back as an astute man of the world. And yet, after all, Mark had been right and he wrong. Men were better and nobler and more patriotic and unselfish than he had believed them to be ; and now he must abide by the consequences of his own mistake.

He had imagined that the only way to govern men was by appealing to their self-love and self-interest ; that the chivalry and patriotism of bygone days were as dead as the days themselves. And now he awakened to find that Englishmen were as loyal and devoted as they had ever been in the days of Alfred or Elizabeth, and that England was as securely enshrined in their hearts now as then.

Had he only been a little simpler, a little more credulous, a little less astute, he would by now have gained his heart's desire and had the ball at his feet ; as it was, a younger and less experienced politician than himself had outstripped him in the race by the simple expedient of believing in God and man. The disappointment was almost more than he could bear.

Again the Unseen Power against Which he struggled had defeated him and brought him to nought ; and this time upon his own ground and with his own weapons. Had he but recognized two facts accepted unquestionably by the larger half of the civilized world—namely, that God is good, and that man is made in His image—he would now without doubt be Prime Minister of the greatest Empire under the sun.

Of course the Liberals would give him a peerage ; that was the least they could do to staunch the wounds of their unhorsed champion. But what did he care for a peerage ? Yes ; there was no doubt that he had made a colossal error—had thrown away one of the finest chances man ever had ; and now there was nothing left for him but political extinction with decent sepulture in the House of Lords.

All his life Conrad Clayton had believed that the English nation was commercial rather than patriotic, worshipping Mammon and greedy for gold ; now he had proved that, on the contrary, it was a great people, loving righteousness and hating iniquity, setting glory above gold, and national honour above commercial success.

Amid all his bitterness of spirit there was in his heart an underlying admiration for the Power Which had so triumphantly got the better of him, so to speak ; he was so just a man that he could not fail to recognize the absolute justice with which he himself had been treated. And, deeper still than his admiration, lay a passionate desire to intercede with this Power on Archie's behalf. He had never prayed in his life before ; but from the heart of

the dethroned statesman there went up an inarticulate cry to the God Who had made him, for that God to spare his only son whom he loved. If only Archie could be saved this present humiliation would count as nothing: it was Archie, and Archie alone, that really mattered. Yet the old preacher had said that God would deal with his firstborn as he had dealt with the firstborn of the gipsy widow-woman. The firstborn of the gipsy had perished upon the gallows, cursed of God and man, and it was all his fault. How could he expect Almighty Justice to show mercy to Archie, when his own mercilessness towards the son of the widow had brought about such terrible results? No; as he had sowed, so must he reap—and bitter indeed would be the harvest!

As Sir Conrad was thus brooding in blank despair, his wife came into the room—the one human being who had never failed him nor disappointed him since he saw her first; but who had loved him with unceasing devotion and obeyed him with unquestioning docility all the long years of their married life. And the broken heart of the man cried out to her for the consolation which no one but a true wife can give.

“Griselda, comfort me; my heart is broken!”

Lady Clayton sat down beside her husband, and stroked his hand.

“Dearest, do not take it to heart in this way. The country has lost its head; but it will find it again, never fear, and will then see what a fool it has made of itself.”

“No, Griselda: it is I who have been the fool—not the country. And by trying to be too clever, which is the most arrant folly of all.”

“My dear love, you are worn out and over-wrought. We will go abroad for a time—you and I and the children—and will forget all the worries and disappointments of this wearying political life. After all, my own, we have each other and the children left; so let us turn our backs upon

the base ingratitude of an intoxicated nation, and shake the dust off our feet against it."

"The nation has not been ungrateful, Griselda."

Conrad was always a just man.

"Not ungrateful, Conrad? Not ungrateful to throw you over after you have served it so faithfully all these years? To me it seems the very quintessence of ingratitude."

"No, I deserve no gratitude from my country, but only from my party: I always was too ready to sacrifice the greater to the less. I forgot my country, and now my party has forgotten me. Mine was the mistake, and mine is the punishment."

Griselda touched her husband's grey hair tenderly.

"But, dearest, you have still got the children and me. Let us be happy together, and forget the inevitable disillusionments of public life."

"But, Griselda, I haven't still got you and the children; that is the worst part of all!" And Conrad groaned aloud.

"Not got me and the children! Dear love, what on earth do you mean?"

"Griselda, I must tell you something! I have kept it to myself all these years for fear of paining you; but now I cannot bear it any longer by myself. I am a broken-down, disappointed old man, and I have no strength left."

"Of course you must tell me, dearest, and let me help you. There is no pain to me so great as seeing you in pain."

The comfort of human sympathy gradually stole into Conrad's soul.

"It's a long story, Griselda, and began nearly half a century ago."

"Never mind, my love; begin to tell it at once."

"When I was a young man—before I had left Cambridge, in fact—I was out shooting one day in the country near Mattingham. You remember it?"

"Perfectly. It was beyond Crompton, and lay to the south of Baxendale Park."

"There I found a little gipsy-boy who had snared and killed a hare. So I collared him, to bring him before the magistrates, as I had been worried by poachers for some time, and wanted to make an example of him."

"And quite right that you should!"

"The little beggar's mother appeared on the scene, and made a great hullabaloo; but I was never the man to be turned from my purpose by a fit of hysterics."

"Of course you weren't, dearest; I should never have loved you as I do if you had been."

"Then suddenly an old wandering preacher jumped over the hedge, and appealed to me for God's sake to spare the boy. He irritated me by what seemed to me then a lot of meaningless balderdash, and said that God would deal with my firstborn son as I dealt with the firstborn son of the gipsy-woman. I was not going to stand being bullied by an old ranter like that, so I just said I accepted his challenge and would take the risk: I meant to mete out strict justice to the impudent little thief; and I asked for nothing more than that God should mete out strict justice to me."

"Yes, dear, I quite understand. It was exactly like you to say that, Conrad."

"The old prophet apparently accepted the challenge on behalf of his Deity; and finally, after spouting a good deal more blue-fire, jumped over the hedge and disappeared. I forget exactly what he said, except his last words—and they have been printed on my brain ever since in letters of blood."

"And what were they, love?"

"They were these: 'Thou shalt heap up riches, but thy firstborn shall never gather them; thou shalt make a great name for thyself, but thy firstborn shall not bear it after thee. And if thou shalt cry unto God for thy firstborn, He

shall not hearken, forasmuch as thou hast not hearkened when this woman cried for her firstborn unto thee !' And the dreadful thing is that they are coming true, Griselda. I have heaped up riches, I have made a great name for myself ; and yet they will all avail me nothing if Archie does not live to inherit them !"

"But Archie will live to inherit them, my love ; and his children after him."

"He will not, Griselda, and that is what is breaking me down—far more than the loss of the Premiership or the decline of my power. Don't you see how Archie has been foredoomed to an early and violent death from his childhood ? Have you forgotten his many narrow escapes at school, his accident on the Carnoch loch, and my gun-accident on the moors ? I do not believe in the God of Revelation, as you know ; but I do believe in an Unknown Power, above and beyond us all, Who challenged me through the mouth of that old preacher, and Whose challenge I accepted, presumptuous fool that I was !" And Sir Conrad buried his face in his hands and groaned aloud.

"Dearest, you should have told me this before, so that I could have helped you."

"Nobody can help me, Griselda, save the Unknown God Whom I have offended ; and I arraigned myself against Him fifty years ago. Besides, the evil I then began has run its course ; the boy, Zadkiel Lee by name, went from bad to worse, and was hanged this spring for one of the foulest murders ever committed. And do you think that the God of the fatherless will spare my son after that ?"

"His ways are not our ways," murmured Griselda, reverting to the phraseology of her childhood in her endeavour to comfort her husband.

"I was warned, and I took my own course with my eyes open. No ; though I am heartbroken, I can see the justice of it all. I have been dealt with as I dealt with others—

neither better nor worse : and the early death, to which I cannot help seeing Archie daily drawing nearer, is my righteous punishment. But all the same, it is a punishment too great for me to bear, for I love Archie as I love my own soul."

"Dearest, be comforted ; Archie will not die a violent death. I am sure of that."

The broken-hearted statesman looked at his wife with despairing eyes.

"Do you mean to tell me, Griselda, that you do not believe that God will fulfil the prophecy He spake by the mouth of His old prophet ?"

"I believe that He will fulfil it to the letter. I have not thought about these things for years ; but this story of yours has brought them back to me, Conrad, and proved to me that the God of my fathers is still a living God."

"And I have fought against the living God, and been defeated."

"Yes, that is so."

"And my firstborn shall neither inherit my riches nor be called after my name."

"That also is so."

"Then there is no help for us anywhere, Griselda. Archie must die for my sin ; and Archie is all the world to me."

Griselda rose from her seat and drew herself to her full height.

"I had forgotten God," she said simply,—“forgotten aill about Him for years and years. But now I know that the old preacher was a man of God, and that he came to call your sin to remembrance, though not to slay your son. God will fulfil His prophecy ; but in His Own way, and not in yours."

"What does it matter to me how He fulfils it, if Archie does not inherit my name and my fortune after me ? You never loved Archie as I do, Griselda, although you are his mother !"

Griselda did not attempt to justify herself, for she knew that her husband's reproach was true.

"Do not fret any more, my dearest. Archie will live, and will inherit your riches, and be called by your name. For Archie is not your firstborn son."

Sir Conrad sprang to his feet.

"Archie not my son? In heaven's name tell me what you mean?"

"Archie is your son, but not your firstborn, Conrad; you have an older son than he."

"Then who is my firstborn son, Griselda? For heaven's sake tell me, and tell me quickly!" And the breath rattled in the man's throat, so strongly moved was he.

Griselda looked her husband full in the face, and he knew that she was speaking the truth.

"Your firstborn son," she answered, "is the new Prime Minister; the man who is known to the world by the name of Mark Stillingfleet."

CHAPTER XI

FULFILMENT

When despair's destroying breath
Comes at eventide to grieve thee
With the bitterness of death—
Love retrieve thee.

—*Verses Wise or Otherwise.*

THERE was a pause of a few interminable seconds and then Conrad gasped :

"Tell me more, Griselda. I do not understand."

"I will tell you all, dearest, if you will promise not to be angry with me, but to believe that what I did I did for the best, out of love for you."

"I swear I will not be angry, whatever you may have done," replied Sir Conrad, feeling that he could forgive his wife anything for having lifted the terrible burden which had lain for years upon his soul.

Lady Clayton sank again into her seat, and drew her husband down beside her.

"Mine is a long story, also, Conrad ; and began, like yours, many years ago."

"Tell it me, Griselda ; tell it me as quickly as you can !"

"You remember the carriage accident which occurred to Lois Stillingfleet and myself just before our babies were born,—a misfortune, by the way, entirely brought about by the gipsy-boy you spoke of, Zadkiel Lee?"

"Yes, yes, of course I remember that ! And it would

have been my own doing, in having sent Lee to the bad, had your life and my child's been sacrificed. As it was, it seemed strange that John Stillingfleet's son, and not mine, was the one to suffer ; but that was not so, according to you."

"When Lois and I were picked up we were both carried to the Stillingfleets' house, she in an unconscious state ; and there, shortly afterwards, her baby—a boy—was born dead."

"Dead? Lois Stillingfleet's baby dead?"

"Yes, Conrad ; and it was not to be wondered at, considering that the poor mother was so injured as to be unconscious for weeks afterwards."

"But about you? What about you, Griselda?"

"The following day my babies were born—twin boys. The elder was a terrible little object—all deformed and twisted out of shape by that cruel accident ; and the younger the most healthy and beautiful child you can imagine."

"Yes, yes!" Sir Conrad's excitement was so great that he could hardly speak.

"Then I was in a dreadful way, for I knew how you hated anything that was weak and sickly. I was afraid that you would cease to love me when you found out that I had given you an unhealthy cripple for your eldest son ; and the thought of life without your love was insupportable to me."

"My poor Griselda, what a brute I was in those days!"

"Oh, no, no! it was only natural that a man so strong and healthy as yourself should shrink from all forms of disease and deformity. Well, as I told you, I was in a dreadful state ; and I begged Dr. Stillingfleet to take away the deformed baby, and never to let you know that it had been born. You see, I was very weak at the time ; and the thought of your anger, when you saw what a wretched little being your baby was, seemed more than I could bear."

"Poor child, how much you must have suffered!"

"Then," Lady Clayton continued, "an idea came to Dr. Stillingfleet. He said that Lois was in such a delicate condition that if she awoke to consciousness to find that her passionately desired baby had been born dead, the shock would assuredly kill her; the disappointment would be too great for her to bear in her extremely fragile state; and he suggested that he should take the deformed baby and pretend that it was hers, as that was the one chance of saving her life."

"Good heavens, Griselda, what a history! And he actually did this thing?"

"Yes. You see, he loved Lois so much that he didn't care what he did to save her life. And circumstances proved that he was right. For when she did at last regain consciousness, her first thought was for her baby; and it was her love for and interest in the child that brought her back to life, and gradually restored her to health."

"And the other boy?"

"The other boy was Archie; and you know, Conrad, what a splendid baby he was, and how proud you were of him when you came home!"

"I was, Griselda. And I have loved him more than anything else in heaven or earth ever since."

Griselda winced. She had always known that she came second to Archibald in her husband's affection; but the knowledge had never lost its power to sting her.

"And you would have been terribly angry with me if you had known that the hideous little object, which was shown to you as the Stillingfleets' baby, was in reality your firstborn son and heir?"

"Heaven forgive me, Griselda, I am afraid I should!"

"You used to hate and despise that child as it was; and whenever you did, I was so thankful you did not know that it was yours."

"That is true, my wife. I have been a proud and sinful man!"

"I know exactly how you would have looked at me if you had learnt that I was the mother of that wretched little creature ; and I felt I could not have endured that look."

"But how did you manage to keep the thing a secret?" Sir Conrad asked.

"Nobody except Dr. Stillingfleet and the nurse and I knew that Lois's baby had been born dead, or that I had had twins ; so it was very easy to dispose of the dead child and to put mine in its place. As for keeping the secret, the doctor and I were not likely to let it out ; and we paid the nurse's passage out to Australia, where she had a brother living, and gave her a large sum of money, in addition, to induce her to hold her tongue. There she married and died, more than twenty years ago."

"Then there is now no living person who knows the secret except yourself and me, Griselda?"

"No, and it will die with us."

Sir Conrad shook his head.

"No, no, that will never do ! I am not a religious man, as you know ; but I am growing superstitious in my old age, and the strange way in which the old preacher's prophecy has fulfilled itself makes me more so. I believe that there is a God, though I know nothing about Him, save that I threw down a challenge to Him nearly fifty years ago, which challenge He accepted."

"Oh, Conrad !"

"I do. See how accurately the whole thing has worked itself out ! There is no miracle in the matter : I do not believe in miracles ; but it is all simple cause and effect. I remember now that the old prophet, Philemon Gleave, said that God does not punish sin ; He merely lets things alone, and allows sin to punish itself."

"That was not my father's creed," argued Griselda.

"But it was Gleave's, and it is mine. See in the present instance how my sin towards the gipsy-boy has worked out its own punishment. If I had not sent him to prison at

that early and impressionable age, he would in all probability not have gone to the bad ; if he had not gone to the bad, he would not have frightened your ponies, and my eldest son would not have been born a cripple ; if my eldest son had not been born a cripple, the clever twin as well as the handsome one would have been acknowledged as mine, and I should now have realized an ambition greater than any I ever cherished for myself—I should be known as the father of the Prime Minister of England ! ”

Griselda gave a little cry.

“ Then you are angry with me after all, my dearest. You do not forgive me for my deceit ! ”

Her husband took her hand.

“ Yes, yes, my dear, I do forgive it. Who am I that I should refuse to pardon a sin which was committed out of love for me ? But your sin, like my own, has worked out its own punishment. You have robbed yourself and me of the greatest happiness that a man and woman can experience, that of being known as the parents of the first man in the Empire. Why, Griselda, do you think I should have minded about losing the Premiership if my son had had it instead ? Not I ! I would far rather be the father of the Prime Minister than the Prime Minister himself ; for it is a nobler because a more unselfish form of pride.”

“ Ah ! and now you can never have that crowning joy, and all through my fault.”

“ Yes, I can have it, but not without paying a heavy price for it—so heavy as to rob it of all its brightness. I can only buy my son’s honour at the cost of my wife’s ; for if Mark is acknowledged as my son, all the world must know of what you did, Griselda, and must mete out its judgment to you, and through you to me, accordingly.”

Lady Clayton shivered.

“ But need we tell anybody ? ”

“ Yes, we must—we must ! Late in the day though it is, there is still time to make some reparation. And I

dare not let the chance slip, lest a worse thing should befall us."

"Then what do you intend to do?"

"I intend to do the only thing possible in the circumstances; I intend to tell Stillingfleet the truth, and then leave him to deal with it as he thinks fit."

"And supposing that he wishes to be acknowledged as your son?"

"I shall at once acknowledge him."

"Even though it ousts Archie from being your heir?"

"Certainly! Archie is no more my heir than Sophy is."

"And have you no thought for me, Conrad?"

Lady Clayton's face was pitiful to look upon.

"Yes, my dear; but you should have had a thought for yourself when first you did this thing. I cannot save you from the consequences of your own actions: nobody can do that except the Omnipotent Being Whom men call God—and apparently He rarely interferes with the course of events in order to do so."

"Then you place my fate in Mark's hands?"

"Nay, Griselda, not I. You placed it there yourself nearly forty years ago."

At that moment the door was thrown open, and the butler announced, "Mr. Stillingfleet."

CHAPTER XII

CONCLUSION

Spare me yet a little space ;
And life's wine upon the lees
Shall not be outpoured to please
Children in the market-place.

—*Verses Wise or Otherwise.*

"I WANT to see you, Sir Conrad," said Mark, as he entered the room, and found to his surprise Lady Clayton there as well as her husband.

Sir Conrad's heart swelled as he looked at the man before him. Here was the foremost statesmen of the day ; a man who had climbed to the top of the political tree before he was forty : and this man was his own son. Was the Ex-Minister to blame if he felt proud as he realized that it was his intellect, reproduced in a younger generation, that was now governing the British Empire—that the only man in England greater than himself was his firstborn son ?

Conrad Clayton was a man in whom the instinct of fatherhood had always been strong ; but never had it stirred in him so strongly as to-day, when he recognized his intellectual superior in his own child.

"I also want to see you," he replied, "to tell you two things. The first is that, contrary to the expectations of the country and the press, I am ready to support you in the

new Administration which you are forming, and to give you all the help you can desire from my knowledge and experience. Instead of attempting to break up the party and weaken the Government by taking up, as the world seems to anticipate, an independent position, I am wishful to offer you my most loyal adherence."

Mark grasped the speaker's hand in grateful amazement.

"Sir Conrad, how can I sufficiently thank you? You are too generous. You know as well as I do that there is nothing which will strengthen the Government so much as your consenting to hold office under me; and nothing which could more successfully split up the party than your opposition to it!"

"I believe you are right there, Mark, and therefore hasten to assure you that my unfaltering support is entirely yours. I was wrong in my idea of what the country desired; but surely the country has a right to have its own way. I have always maintained that the country ought to have what it wanted; but in this case I was mistaken as to what the wishes of the country were. Now that I realize my mistake I am ready to retrieve it."

The new Prime Minister was deeply touched, for he could not fail to know what a bitter disappointment his success entailed upon the man whose harvest he was reaping and into whose labours he had entered. He was right in feeling that the generosity which the defeated statesman was now showing towards his triumphant rival was little short of sublime; but he did not as yet know that the reason for this almost Divine self-sacrifice was the same as the reason for that great Self-sacrifice which was indeed Divine.

Most people rise to approximate perfection in at least one relation of life, however faulty they may prove themselves in the others; some men are at their best as sons, some as brothers, some as husbands; and it was as a father that Conrad Clayton reached his high-water mark of moral

excellence. It was as a father that the man attained his full spiritual stature, and showed to the world the Divine image and superscription which his Maker had stamped upon his soul.

There was something slightly mean in the historic anger of Henry IV. when he found his son trying on the crown—a meanness of which the Duke of Mershire's Home Secretary would never have been guilty. So strong was the paternal instinct in Conrad Clayton, that the success and happiness of his children were more to him than his own; and therefore the natural bitterness which he could not but feel against the young man who had rivalled and supplanted him, was turned into purely unselfish joy when he learnt that his successful rival was no stranger nor alien, but very bone of his bone and flesh of his flesh.

“And there is a second thing I have to say to you, Mark,” continued Sir Conrad, taking a seat and motioning the younger man to do the same; “and that is to tell you the reason of my decision to serve under you and support you through thick and thin.”

“I know that already,” interrupted Mark. “The reason lies in your own most generous nature, and in the unswerving justice which has always been one of the distinguishing traits of your character.”

Sir Conrad shook his head.

“No, no! I am fairly just, I admit, but not so just as all that. Only this morning I was full of bitterness against you, and quite ready to lose no opportunity of harassing your Ministry. But since then I have become possessed of a piece of information which has entirely altered my whole attitude towards you—which has entirely altered my whole attitude towards life, in fact.”

“And that is, Sir Conrad——?”

Lady Clayton put up her hand to her throat as if she were being suffocated; but she did not speak.

"And that is," continued her husband, taking her disengaged hand in his own, "the startling—the almost incredible—information that you are my own son."

The new Prime Minister passed his hand over his brow.

"Please explain," he said feebly: "I don't understand. How can I be your son when I am the son of John and Lois Stillingfleet?"

"In this way," replied Sir Conrad; and then, as briefly as he could, he told Mark the whole story, as his wife had told it to him.

During the recital Lady Clayton sat very still; she was not as much moved thereby as either of the men. She had made her confession to Conrad, had relieved his mind of the burden which was crushing him, and had been absolved by him for what she had done; and that was all that mattered to her. She had ever been a woman of one idea, and that idea her husband.

"And now," said Sir Conrad in conclusion, when the tale was told, "I leave the matter entirely in your hands, my dear Mark. It is for you, and you alone, to decide whether you shall at once be acknowledged as my son, and take your place as my heir; or whether you will wait until after my death and your mother's, before you tell the world the truth. I must leave you to think it over, and decide as you think best."

Mark raised his head, which had been hidden in his hands during the telling of the story.

"There is no need to think it over, Sir Conrad; my decision is already made."

The father's heart throbbed with pride. His son knew his own mind as he had always known his. Sir Conrad had no patience with people who shilly-shallied.

"And that is——?" he asked.

"That is to leave the matter as it stands; and never to let the world into our secret at all, either during our lifetime or afterwards,"

Lady Clayton gave a sigh of relief.

"But, my dear boy," said Sir Conrad, "that decision is most generous—most noble—on your part, but it is hardly fair to yourself. There is no doubt that in time I shall forsake the House of Commons and take a peerage; and then you, and not Archie, will be the rightful heir to my title and estates."

"Nevertheless Archie must have them, and not I."

"But, my dear Mark, I repeat that it is not fair to yourself."

"I was not thinking of myself," said Mark simply; "I was thinking of my mother."

"Oh! thank you, thank you, my son!" cried Griselda; and her husband added:

"Your mother is most sensible—as indeed I am—of your chivalry towards her in shielding her good name from idle tongues; but you must not be sacrificed even to her."

"I'm afraid I wasn't thinking of Lady Clayton at all," explained Mark simply: "I meant my own mother—at least, the woman who has always been a mother to me—Lois Stillingfleet."

Griselda winced. It is never pleasant for a woman, however much she may deserve it, to see another woman preferred by her own children to herself.

"You see," the Prime Minister continued, "when once wrong has been done, it isn't undone by the doing of what in the first instance was right; indeed, that often makes the wrong the greater, and so ceases to be right at all."

"But how can what is right ever become what is wrong?" asked Lady Clayton.

"It can and does," explained her son. "For instance, it is wrong of a woman to marry a man she doesn't love; but, having married him, to run away from him doesn't lessen the wrong, but increases it tenfold—though to have

run away from him before she married him would have been the best thing of all. There is no going back and no undoing in this life; and that is one of the most terrible truths we ever have to learn."

Griselda sighed.

"Then what we have once done we can never undo as long as we live."

"Never," replied Mark; "just as what we have once said we never can unsay. And, after all, why should your friend, Lois Stillingfleet, be punished for your sin, Lady Clayton? If it would have killed her more than forty years ago to learn that her baby was born dead, it would certainly kill her now to be told that the son she has worshipped all his life is not really her son at all. And she never shall be told it while I live, so help me, God!"

"I did it for the best," moaned Griselda.

Mark smiled.

"You thought you knew better than God did, and that is always a mistake. He knows His Own business best, you may depend upon it; and ours, too, for the matter of that."

Griselda was silent.

"And there is another thing," he continued, "which weighs with me in making this decision. I believe that God actually chose to speak to you, Sir Conrad, through the mouth of His prophet, the wandering preacher; and that therefore what that old man foretold must and will come true. You imagined, and naturally so, that the prophecy would be fulfilled through the violent death of Archie; but God found a more merciful and excellent way of bringing it to pass: but all the same, He is bringing it to pass; remember that."

"Yes, that is so," Sir Conrad admitted.

"I do not think, as you do, that God is a blind Force; I believe He is a living Person, stooping in His love

to reason and to plead with the sons of men. He warned you that if you refused to have mercy upon the firstborn of the gipsy-woman, your firstborn should never inherit your name or your fortune ; and as you accepted His challenge, so I believe He will abide by His Word."

Sir Conrad groaned.

"And you must bear the consequences of my sin ! Is that just ?"

"The sins of the fathers shall be visited upon the children even unto the third and fourth generation."

"But what about Eileen ?" interrupted Lady Clayton. "Will she be content to let the matter die out, and to forego her rights ; or shall you never tell her the secret ?"

"I shall tell her the secret," Mark said ; "and ask her to decide what course we ought to pursue."

"But I thought that you had already decided."

"So I have, Lady Clayton. But she also must decide, and her decision will be the same as mine."

"How do you know that ?"

"Because I know her."

"But I don't see how you can decide beforehand, and yet let her decide," argued Griselda.

"It is like the old conflict between Free Will and Predestination, isn't it?" replied Mark ; "which really wasn't a conflict at all, if only men had come a little nearer to the truth and so reconciled the two. I tell you candidly that if Eileen wishes it, I will tell my mother the whole story to-morrow, and stand before the world as your son. But she will no more wish it than the sunshine will freeze us, or than God's blessing will be turned into the devil's curse."

For the first time during the interview, Sir Conrad broke into a smile.

"That is your old dodge, Stillingfleet : by expecting people to do what is right, you make them do it. You will

manage your wife as successfully as you will govern the country, and by the same means."

"No, Sir Conrad! It is Eileen who has thus managed me, and so has taught me how to govern the country. It isn't I who have called out the best in her, but she who has called out the best in me."

"And you believe that it is she, and she alone, who has made you what you are?"

"I am absolutely sure that whatever good there is in me is all owing to her influence."

Sir Conrad shrugged his shoulders.

"Yes, you are thoroughly in love; there could not be two opinions on that score. A man who will believe that a woman's influence has made a Prime Minister of him, will believe anything."

Mark laughed.

"Well, I do believe it, all the same. And now I must be going," he added, rising from his seat, "to tell Eileen what I have just heard."

"And to put her to the test?"

"No, Sir Conrad; but to tell her that I myself have been put to the test, and, owing to her influence upon me, have not failed."

"And you will come to-morrow to talk politics?" cried Sir Conrad.

"Most assuredly I will, and with heartfelt gratitude for the benefit of your superior age and knowledge and experience."

When Mark had made his adieux and departed, and the two older people were left alone, Lady Clayton went up to her husband and placed both hands upon his shoulders.

"Conrad, say once more that you forgive me," she pleaded.

He bent his worn face down to hers and kissed her on the forehead.

"I forgive you from the bottom of my heart, my love—as I trust the Unknown God, Whom I have so long and so vainly struggled against, will forgive me. But oh, Griselda, think what a fool I have been!"

"Not a fool, my love! Never a fool!"

"Yes, a fool—a fool of the finest water. Forgiveness may change the future, but it cannot alter the past: what we have written we have written upon the pages of our lives; and there is no moral indiarubber strong enough to erase that superscription."

"Alas! dear heart, that is only too true."

"Think what a career I should have had if only I had recognized earlier the fundamental goodness as well as greatness of the English people! I should have attained to the very summit of private happiness and of public success."

"But you forgive me, my dearest? You are not angry with me?"

Griselda was always very woman, losing the principle in the illustration and the absolute in the concrete.

"Yes, my dear; once again I say to you that I forgive you absolutely. What you did, you did for the best according to your lights; and your sin was committed solely out of your too great love for me. But oh, Griselda!" and here the strong man's voice broke into a wail of passionate regret, "you have robbed me for ever of the crowning joy that was my right—the joy of lifting up my head among men as the father of the Prime Minister of England."

While his parents were dreeing their weird, and realizing that what they had done they had done and there was no undoing, Mark likewise was reaping the harvest he had sown.

"Well," exclaimed Eileen, when he had finished his story, "it is wonderful, simply wonderful! Just like a tale out of a fairy book."

"It is, my own ; most wonderful ! I can scarcely believe it yet."

"And isn't it marvellous, Mark, how God has fulfilled to the letter the prophecy that seemed so dreadful ; and yet has done so with no dreadfulness at all ?"

"His ways are not our ways, you see, my darling."

"No, but far higher. It was a pity, however, that Lady Clayton took God's affairs into her own hands : He could have managed quite well without her interference."

"His way is always the best ; but sometimes He lets us have our own, so that we may see for ourselves how much better His really is, and how foolish we are not to trust Him more completely and leave everything in His Hands. As if He were not quite competent to govern the world, if only men would believe it ! But," Mark continued, "you haven't yet told me what I am to do."

"What you are to do ? How do you mean ?"

"Whether I am to make the story public and be recognized as Sir Conrad's son, or whether it is still to remain a secret."

"Why, Mark, of course it must remain a secret ! You could not be so cruel to either of your mothers as to make it public property. It would break both their hearts."

"Then it must rest as it is ?"

"I see no other course open."

Mark smiled.

"I knew you'd say that, my dearest love."

"Then why did you ask me such a question ?"

"Because I knew the answer. And it isn't the first time that I've asked you a question for that reason."

"And you call yourself a Prime Minister ? Bah !"

"I call you an angel."

"Well, whatever of angelicalness there is in me is all your doing, Mark. I wasn't a bit good or nice or anything till I met you ; but since you became my friend, and

showed me how good it is to be good and how nice it is to be nice, I really have behaved pretty well upon the whole."

Mark took her into his arms.

"My own little child, how I adore you!"

"Little child indeed—when I'm getting into the shadier shadows of the thirties!"

"I don't care for that, my sweet; you'll always be young to me—always the girl who looked at me through the hammock, and stole my heart away."

"The same sauce which is used for the goose is the proper condiment to serve with the gander," Eileen replied, "so you'll always be my young lover to me. They can make you a Prime Minister as often as they like, or even Archbishop of Canterbury if it pleases them, as far as I am concerned; but to me you'll never be anything but a fairy-prince—the best, nicest, dearest, cleverest fairy-prince in all fairyland. But oh, my love," and here the laughter died out of her eyes and her voice broke, "how splendidly you have done, and how proud I am of you!"

Mark stroked her hair tenderly, but he did not speak.

"I always knew you'd win success in the end," Eileen went on, "because you are so good. You are a good man, Mark!"

"I have tried to be," replied Mark simply.

"You have done more than try, my beloved; you have succeeded."

"All the same," said Mark, with his old whimsical smile, "I don't think that the secret of my success lay in my own goodness, but in my belief in the goodness of the English people."

"But, dearest, you have always tried to do what was right in the abstract, rather than what was advantageous to yourself or acceptable to the country at large?"

"That is so."

"And you have always believed that the truth was strong, and would in the end prevail?"

"Yes, my darling, that also is so. But I believed a good deal more than that. I not only believed that it was the duty of a statesman to follow the highest and most ideal course, utterly regardless of whether it was popular or the reverse; I also believed that the great heart of the English people was sound at its core, and was hungering and thirsting after national and political righteousness, if only it could learn where national and political righteousness was to be found.

Eileen looked up at her lover with worship in her eyes.

"Dearest, you are great as well as good, and I adore you with all my heart!"

"But do not misunderstand me, my sweet. I do not mean that I took the right course for the reason that I believed it would prove also the most popular. God forbid! The public man who chooses the ideally right rather than the conventionally popular, must be prepared for misunderstanding and misrepresentation and disappointment and personal failure; the truth will prevail in the end, but not each separate preacher of it. Nevertheless his life will not be wasted; he will have served as a sign-post upon that upward path which the British nation, either sooner or later, is bound to tread—in fact which it is treading even now, though the way is beset by stones of stumbling and rocks of offence set up by mere place-hunters and party-politicians."

"And you don't believe that the mere place-hunters and party-politicians will ever succeed?"

"They may for the time being, but not permanently; they will probably win place, but never the highest kind of power; for the good reason that the mainspring of English public life, the fundamental force of the British national

character, is neither the cult of the jumping cat nor the worship of the golden calf, whatever cheap cynicism may choose to say."

"Then what is it?" Eileen asked.

"I believe it is the fear of the Lord," replied Mark;
"which fear is the beginning—and the end—of wisdom."

THE END

